

An Archaeology of Human Captivity

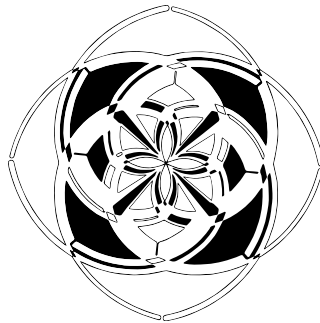


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A Study
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I.

The politicization of basic human life processes can be observed in many discursive realms, from the religious and secular dogmatic debates about abortion and contraception to the ethical quandaries prompted by the eugenic potential to clone an individual, or modify the genome of an embryo which has been found to harbor some undesirable genetic trait. Beyond the blanket questions about whether we ought to “meddle with Mother Nature” are a host of practical considerations where Man is managed like livestock: who will be interested in compiling genetic databases on living populations, and for what reasons? What would a health insurance firm or a government agency do with such information? Who gets to decide what pieces of genetic information qualify as “actionable intelligence?” Will these institutional interests foster a black market for illicit genetic samples, a grey market for “genetic private investigators,” or engender a new era of “genetic blackmail?” What is compelling about these debates is precisely that they are political: few common distinctions between Man and animal -- such as that drawn by the use of language -- are truly grounded in the inherent traits of the individual; rather, these distinctions frequently relate to the behavior of collectivities defined by political and socioeconomic boundaries.

Politics is, in important respects, the product of a collective memory: it is a narrative that synchronizes the behaviors and attitudes and day-to-day goals of many animals; where politics is absent there may be conflict or agreement, but no blood feud nor history of oppression. Aristotle held that “man is by nature a political animal.”¹ It may be exceedingly difficult to disprove him in this. Memory is both the product of historical accident, and central to our sense of self, as it defines a sort of inevitability through which our present experiences take on meaning; at the same time, we somehow hold politics to be more than accident. We widely hold the political economy to be an organizing factor in the direction of society, and to be an explanation for various social problems or accomplishments (or personal attitudes, as the case may be).

Where political memory comes to us as a social inheritance of linguistic conventions or systems of property ownership and trade, however, we find profound difficulties “in the moment” connecting the subjective value of individual deeds to historically-coherent fluctuations in broader social currents. Consider in this connection that the word “fuck,” for example, was not always an expletive, but was once an ordinary Anglo-Saxon word for “copulate,” borrowed from a Germanic dialect (possibly Old Dutch). After the Norman Conquest, the vocabulary of the subjugated population became “dirty” or otherwise viewed pejoratively.

1 Aristotle, *Politics* I.2. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. “For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best. Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the ‘Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one,’ whom Homer denounces -- the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war...”

Science, like politics, deals in models: of reality and of social organization. These models -- whether mathematical or sociological -- typically focus on general contours to the exclusion of particular instances: the scientist measuring the speed of a falling body or an electrical voltage will almost never obtain exactly the same measurement twice; but this variation among individual readings is discarded in favor of some abstract model's immediate utility. Significant details about the individual and the particular -- however categorized -- typically remain beyond the realm of systematic, precise description, and can become lost in the "big picture" view as "common sense" accrues around these models. Yet, the extent to which an individual fish swimming with or against the stream can affect subtle alterations in the course of a river is not so unlike the deeds of an individual human amidst the currents of language or history; and the way in which the shifting or verdant Land (whose lifespan surpasses that of any individual) therefore has a collective memory is not so unlike how Man (understood as a historically-situated politico-linguistic being) has a collective memory. While we casually claim "the top" of the food chain, or fancy our brain "the most complex machine" in the solar system, there is considerable room for a more nuanced view. It is not possible for each individual's brain to be "the most" complex; and when we consider the nature of this complexity -- the vast interconnections of neurons -- we find similar complexity many other places. Who are we to say that the human brain is objectively more complex than the rings of Saturn, and all their multitudinous particles and minute gravitational influences? ² Collections of neurons, galactic dust particles, and human collectivities all exhibit similar types of complexity.³ And most of what we --

2 Jacob D. Bekenstein, "Information in the Holographic Universe," *Scientific American Reports*, Volume 17, Number 1, 2007. "A century of developments in physics has taught us that information is a crucial player in physical systems and processes. Indeed, a current trend, initiated by John A. Wheeler of Princeton University, is to regard the physical world as made of information, with matter and energy as incidentals... Thermodynamic entropy is popularly described as the disorder in a physical system. In 1877 Austrian physicist Ludwig von Boltzmann characterized it more precisely in terms of the number of distinct microscopic states that the particles composing a chunk of matter could be in while still looking like the same macroscopic chunk of matter... The Shannon entropy of a message is the number of binary digits, or bits, needed to encode it. Shannon entropy does not enlighten us about the value of information, which is highly dependent on context. Yet as an objective measure of quantity of information, it has been enormously useful in science and technology... Thermodynamic entropy and Shannon entropy are conceptually equivalent..."

3 Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science*, Wolfram Media, Inc., 2002. Page 719: "According to the Principle of Computational Equivalence therefore it does not matter how simple or complicated either the rules or the initial conditions for a process are: so long as the process itself does not look obviously simple, then it will almost always correspond to a computation of equivalent sophistication. And what this suggests is that a fundamental unity exists across a vast range of processes in nature and elsewhere..." Compare to Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, George Braziller, Inc., 1972. Page 85: "If an object is a system, it must have certain general system characteristics, irrespective of what the system is otherwise... The homology of system characteristics does not imply reduction of one realm to another and lower one. But neither is it mere metaphor or analogy; rather, it is a formal correspondence founded in reality inasmuch as it can be considered as constituted of 'systems' of whatever kind." Bertalanffy presages Wolfram's later approach specifically, *ibid.* page 94: "further syntheses, e.g.,

as individuals -- think we know about the present world is really constructed from our memories: past experiences with language, with what we perceive as clearly delineated events, or impressions garnered from the media or from past interactions with other people. Social complexity is at once as ethereal as memory or metaphor, and also the product of definite historical accretions. For each of us, our past is given a definite shape though historical institutions like standardized education, entrenched social customs, the dictionary as a record of human activity, and the mass media as a maker of mythologies.

Yet the Earth -- though in every way animate -- is somehow distinguishable from the animal, and Man further distinguishable from the animal. Why this distinction between Man and animal should exist -- whether this boundary is the product of some Natural difference between person and critter, or whether it is one factor among many which serves to perpetuate or further our history of exploiting the environment -- is difficult to discern concretely. We are both a part of Planet Earth in a cosmic sense, and quite apart from it in a more local sense. In yet another sense, however, it is not so important why this distinction exists; rather, what it is practical to consider is what is to be done about (or with) this distinction, now that this exploitation manifests itself as a systematic enterprise on a scale we can scarcely apprehend -- let alone justify -- as individuals.

II.

Philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari identify three different types of animal: individuated animals, State animals, and demonic animals. While this categorization sounds dramatic, the authors immediately call its value into question when they assert that “any animal can be treated in all three ways.”⁴ Whether one chooses to view these divisions as partaking of some Platonic ontological reality, as purely rhetorical, or as a matter of strict empirical observation, there are various difficulties associated with the interpretation or application of the thesis.

The individuated animal is associated with an industrial, bourgeois conception of how the animal realm has been colonized in some manner; the sense is that this colonization is a relatively recent phenomenon, an interpretation implied by Deleuze and Guattari’s characterization of the “family pet”⁵ (which can be contrasted against the pre-industrialized necessity of cohabitation with a multitude of animals in a context of direct interdependence).

between irreversible thermodynamics and information theory, are slowly developing.”

4 Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 11th printing, translated by Brian Massumi. Page 241. “Or once again, cannot any animal be treated in all three ways? There is always the possibility that a given animal, a louse, a cheetah or an elephant, will be treated as a pet, my little beast. And at the other extreme, it is also possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack or swarm...”

5 *ibid.*, Page 240. “individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands...”

The individuated animal, however, is not a purely modern invention. While the origins of capitalism can be reasonably dated to Medieval Flanders (specifically, urban migrations to textile manufactures that broke down the feudal social order), Plutarch among others documented the exploits of Alexander the Great and his favorite horse, Bucephalus. While the antiquity of Plutarch's account might incline one to assign Bucephalus to the second category of animal, which includes the State-sponsored myth, it is worth noting in this regard that the nation-state as we understand it today did not exist in Alexander's time; today, contiguous threads of Greek governance ideology are not so pronounced as those of Roman governance (the latter, incidentally, persists as a continuous, historical organization in the form of the Roman Catholic Church, which in turn may be seen as having profoundly influenced Western conceptions of hierarchy and bureaucracy and, consequently, industrial management ideology; in this respect it is worth emphasizing that CEO's are management, not owner-operators, and that, furthermore, their social status is derived from a psychological identification with an authoritarian valuation of hierarchy, rather than from entrepreneurial initiative or democratic consensus).

The second category -- that of the State animal -- involves the taxonomic categories enforced by hegemonic forces such as science, religion, and the like,⁶ which reinforce social norms advantageous to various forms of institutional coercion (such as the Western preoccupation with categorization). This is perhaps the least problematic category of the three, although not without its own complications. To criticize the "State animals" of today is to criticize State exploitation, insofar as the State is a socio-cultural construct meant to identify and maintain for perpetuity certain modes of intellectual and economic production and ownership (such as the applied sciences or the financial creation of a debtor class) which have proven to be lucrative in the past.⁷ Yet to criticize scientific taxonomy complicates a Marxist political interpretation of history or human cultural production, as Marx himself considered his analyses to be eminently scientific in nature. Marx believed that "empirical observation must show empirically, without any mystification or speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production."⁸ Marx's

6 *ibid.*, Page 239. "Animal characteristics can be mythic or scientific. But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling."

7 *ibid.*, Page 373. "the ambulant or nomad sciences do not destine science to take on an autonomous power, or even to have an autonomous development. They do not have the means for that because they subordinate all their operations to the sensible conditions of intuition and construction... In contrast, what is proper to royal science, to its theorematic or axiomatic power, is to isolate all operations from the conditions of intuition, making them true intrinsic concepts, or 'categories.'"

8 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Part I*. Printed in *Selected Writings of Karl Marx*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1994. Page 111. "Definite individuals who are productively active in a specific way enter into these definite social and political relations ... The social structure and the state continually evolve out of the life-process of definite individuals ... as they work, produce materially, and act under definite material limitations, presuppositions, and conditions independent of their will."

ideas are very much in keeping with the Rationalist and Enlightenment traditions which Deleuze and Guattari seem to so vehemently oppose, even as they adopt various Marxist tenets for the purposes of their critique.⁹ It could be argued that Deleuze and Guattari are under no obligation to remain consistent with Marxism -- that they offer a critique of Marxism, and in so doing they pick and choose those ideas from Marx which are most useful to their purposes (since “ideas are always reusable”¹⁰). But if the point of their project, in opposing certain prominent strains in the Rationalist tradition (including Marxism), is essentially a discursive investigation designed to confound methodological analysis, then it may still be necessary to maintain that their observations about animals aren’t really about animals at all -- unless Man is foremost an animal.

The third category of animal -- the demonic -- is especially mystifying. Deleuze and Guattari invoke a sort of Marxist materialism when they assert that “a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest.”¹¹ While positing a variant of the Cartesian tradition’s definition of matter as consisting in “extension,” by asserting the demonic, they run contrary to both materialism and Marxist atheism -- unless the demonic animal is to be subsumed under the State-sponsored myth, and thus rendered superfluous.

With respect to religious hegemony, it is worth noting that Modern science grew out of esoteric Renaissance Christian traditions, to which was added the myth of Progress (perhaps adapted from the Semitic tradition’s historical teleology); in this context, science is not inherently at odds with religion or faith or other state-sponsored mythologies, but covalent.

Ontologically, Deleuze and Guattari’s division of the animal into three categories is somewhat arbitrary. The categories for their definitions rely on neither formal qualities nor on an essentialist sort of inductive reasoning (since

9 See, for example, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Page 447. “Marx made the observation in the case of capitalism: there is a violence that necessarily operates through the State, precedes the capitalist mode of production, constitutes the ‘primitive accumulation,’ and makes possible the capitalist mode of production itself.” Or, Page 463: “If Marx demonstrated the functioning of capitalism as an axiomatic, it was above all in the famous chapter on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Capitalism is indeed an axiomatic, because it has no laws but immanent ones. It would like for us to believe that it confronts the limits of the Universe, the extreme limit of resources and energy.”

10 *ibid.*, Page 235. “Ideas are always reusable, because they have been usable before, but in the most varied of actual modes. For, on the one hand, the relationships between animals are the object not only of science but also of dreams, symbolism, art and poetry, practice and practical use. And on the other hand, the relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman, man and child, man and the elements, man and the physical and microphysical universe.”

11 *ibid.*, Page 260. “On the plane of consistency, a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds. The credit goes to Spinoza for calling attention to these two dimensions of the Body, and for having defined the plane of Nature as pure longitude and latitude.”

any animal can belong to all three categories). There is an implicit privileging of Man as that animal which makes categories; yet even such an account of what might be one of our distinctive features is confounded when the animal is viewed as a sort of phenomenological limit, since we cannot, for example, ask for a straightforward confirmation as to whether or not an animal also categorizes his or her experiences.

III.

When George Orwell wrote that “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,”¹² he meant to satirize civil society. The original thrust of the dictum can be generalized, however: our elevation of Man over animal is at best delusion and at worst an atrocity. Factory farms proliferate despite a widespread agreement that cruelty to animals is wrong. We accept industry-wide medical testing on animals because it saves human lives -- even though many of the medical conditions these “inhumane” experiments are designed to treat would not exist in the absence of organized industry. Delusion or atrocity, we deny or ignore all that we share in common with animals -- including sentience and emotion and the materiality of our DNA -- and are reluctant to acknowledge that we depend on them utterly, historically as today, more than we truly lord over them.

Marx asserted that Man “can be distinguished from the animal by consciousness, religion, or anything else you please. He begins to distinguish himself from the animal the moment he begins to *produce* his subsistence.”¹³ Empirically, it seems on the face of things unnecessary to investigate why humans are different from animals: we can easily perceive that, among a great many other things, we have language while animals do not; and we assume it follows that what has language is also somehow human, while what lacks language is animal or otherwise insentient. And so animal life is a natural resource insofar as it is a product of nature but non-human. A similar argument could be made for any number of human traits, from our particular use of tools to our possession of certain discrete sequences of protein-encoding nucleotides. Yet many of these distinctions are matters of perspective: why do we not commonly consider a bird building a nest as capable of using tools, or a bee gathering nectar and pollen as working to produce a subsistence?

The distinction between human and animal is often posited as consisting in something which humans have that animals lack. Consciousness, religion,

12 George Orwell, *Animal Farm*. Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1964. Page 123.

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Part I*. Printed in *Selected Writings of Karl Marx*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1994. Page 107. “By producing food, man indirectly produces his material life itself... This mode of production must not be viewed simply as reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of their activity, a definite way of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life*. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with what they produce, with *what* they produce and *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions which determine their production.”

ontology, language -- anything will do. Why these distinctions, however, should be interpreted as license for the exploitation of anything we find (minerals, animals, and gods alike) relates to a presumed (received) superiority derived from a few distinct mythologies of conquest and colonization combined with the late Renaissance innovation of Progress, which allowed the growth of empire to be equated with the quantifiable growth of capital (and, eventually, technological capital specifically).

What is at issue here is why our human technology and culture and language should be viewed as advantageous or as somehow positioning us as superior to the animals on the Great Chain of Being. Billions of humans today lack such basic amenities as indoor plumbing, not unlike the animals. It is worth now reiterating that what are often considered humanity's defining characteristics are social in nature: language, religion, politics, art, acquired technology and the like. In reality, there is perhaps quite little that convincingly demonstrates Man's superiority over the animal -- whether a Man confronts an untamed tiger in the jungle or the meekest individual locust in a mythological swarm. If our "advanced" nuclear weapons, for example, prove substantially more effective than steel blades at destroying human life, is it right to call this Progress? The alternative would seem to be to view Man's defining characteristics as distinctly *anti-social* in nature.

IV.

According to Aldous Huxley, "Animals have no lack of sacred causes. What could be more sacred to a tiger than fresh meat or tigress? What is lacking in the animal's world is the verbal machinery for describing and justifying these sacred causes. Without words, perseverance and consistency of behavior are... impossible. And without perseverance in slaughter and consistency in hatred there can be no war."¹⁴ So while animals may, as Marx suggests, lack religion, they might still attain to the sacred. And whatever animals don't think to claim now is what Man will soon gain through a mythology of eternal conquest, which though peculiar in origin, has spread as far and wide as industry itself. There is, therefore, a paradoxical nature to this perseverance and consistency that Man seems alone in possessing: this possession subsists entirely in dis-possession. We organize society to -- on a mass scale -- take from other living things life and dominion, for reasons we can scarcely justify as individuals, yet which we accept unquestioningly as the ordinary consequences of our "advanced" civilization.

In recent times it seems especially evident that what humans most notably have that animals lack are precisely those same means by which we can also systematically render the planet uninhabitable: our "superior" intelligence would be a curious survival advantage, indeed, if its end result is to wipe the planet

¹⁴ Aldous Huxley, "Words and their Meanings." Printed in *The Importance of Language*, edited by Max Black. Cornell Paperbacks, 1969. Page 5.

clean of our race. Perhaps, really, it is not at all the case that we are superior to the animals, or better endowed by nature; perhaps we are a massive genetic fluke, a mistake, most notably *lacking* in some vital regulatory mechanism that nearly all other organisms seem to possess (save, perhaps, for the viruses, or where afflicted with certain cancers).¹⁵ In a relatively straightforward material sense, to exploit something -- such as an animal population -- in itself acknowledges a type of lacking, insofar as whatever one exploits is only valuable because it possess what one does not. Perhaps it is humanity that lacks something essential that animals have, and we can scarcely help but mistake our lacking for something we possess, as we populate the void like a virus with gods and mythologies.

Jorge Luis Borges addresses a similar theme in "The God's Script." The story involves two captives: a man and a jaguar in the cell beside him. As the man contemplates his captivity, searching for some meaning in it, he suffers a revelation of the god's will writ in the flesh of his fellow captive. He declares of this message he at first only vaguely discerns: "I imagined the first morning of time; I imagined my god confiding his message to the living skin of the jaguars, who would love and reproduce without end, in caverns, in cane fields, on islands, in order that the last men might receive it."¹⁶ The meaning of the man's captivity is held in a secret message written in the configuration of spots on the jaguar's skin; and here again, *the animal is for the man*. The animal partakes of the immanent divinity while the man can only look on in wonderment, though the story does not make clear whether the animal in any way apprehends the message entrusted to His very being. In contemplating the jaguar -- and thereby apprehending the divine Logos -- the man grasps that "there is no proposition that does not entail the entire universe; to say *the tiger* is to say the tigers that begot it, the deer and the turtles devoured by it, the grass on which the deer fed, the earth that was mother to the grass, the heaven that gave birth to the grass."¹⁷ The man turns over this reticulation of the Word until even his own name becomes meaningless, and the man becomes undifferentiated from his environment, reduced (or, perhaps, restored) to his animal nature, yet newly infused with the presence of the divine (not unlike the captive jaguar, which is the god's very message, but which does not

15 Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Translated by John Wilson, 1668: "Don't you find among the several kinds of living creatures that they thrive best that understand no more than what Nature taught them? What is more prosperous or wonderful than the bee? And though they have not the same judgment of sense as other bodies have, yet wherein has architecture gone beyond their building of houses? What philosopher ever founded the like republic? ... In like manner I can never sufficiently praise that Pythagoras in a dunghill cock, who being but one had been yet everything, a philosopher, a man, a woman, a king, a private man, a fish, a horse, a frog, and, I believe too, a sponge; and at last concluded that no creature was more miserable than man, for that all other creatures are content with those bounds that nature set them, only man endeavors to exceed them. And again, among men he gives the precedency not to the learned or the great, but the fool."

16 Jorge Luis Borges, "The God's Script." Printed in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, New Directions, 1964. Page 171.

17 *ibid.*, Page 171.

consciously act on that meaning). In this sense the man becomes the jaguar, which is “one of the attributes of the god.”¹⁸ Yet, what the story seems to make overt is that Man is just as much a captive as any politicized animal, despite (or perhaps, in virtue of) the ability to use language. The animal contains the divine, yet does not possess it. Man apprehends the divine Logos, but cannot exercise this knowledge.

Property, which humans possess but animals lack, therefore involves another paradox: by possessing anything -- by viewing things in the environment primarily as objects to possess or which are otherwise owned -- we are always made acutely aware of all we do not have. In the midst of our industrial, mass-produced abundance, we are nevertheless surrounded at all times by a sort of individual deprivation. Humans are driven to acquire, while animals remain free to live. Even in captivity, the animal is not so tormented as Man; and though Man possesses language -- and even grapples with the divine infinitude -- this is not especially to Man’s advantage, as Man does not thereby escape from captivity.

V.

In a text from antiquity, apocryphally attributed to “Plato of Athens,” a Stranger in dialog with Young Socrates discusses the transformations of the Universe, how destiny and will, in turn, affect the evolution of matter in Time. After some prompting by Young Socrates, the Stranger in attempting to expound his cosmology remarks: “I will pass over the animals, because it would take too long for me to account for their transformations, and I will confine myself to Man, whose case can be more shortly stated and is more relevant to the point. When Mankind had been deprived of the care of the Spirit who had been our shepherd, the majority of wild beasts that were fierce by nature turned savage, while Man himself became weak and defenseless.”¹⁹ Man is not, in virtue of any essential nature, master of his environment -- at least not in the mythologized Semitic sense wherein by divine mandate Man is given “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”²⁰ The Judeo-Christian eschatological conquest theology holds out hope for a future, utopian state of affairs, in which “all animals, feeding then only on the productions of the earth, would become peaceable and harmonious, and be in perfect subjection to man.”²¹

18 ibid. Page 170.

19 Plato of Athens, “Politicus.” Published in *Greek Historical Thought* compiled by Arnold J. Toynbee. Mentor Books, Third Printing, July 1953. Page 132.

20 King James Bible, *Genesis* 1:28. “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...”

21 Papias, from *Fragments from the Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, IV: “As the elders who saw John the disciple of the Lord remembered that they had heard from him how the Lord taught in regard to those times, and said: ‘The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in every one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five-and-twenty metretes of

The limitations of the human animal -- and our captivity under the Law of Nature -- are the subject of the Greek myth of Prometheus. In the Greek tradition, what appears to Modern Man as an innate superiority over nature is properly a product of chance and struggle (and possibly a precarious superiority at that).

The Semitic-Abrahamic tradition -- which allows that animals are akin to any other sort of raw material, such as metal, stone, or plant matter -- would seem to hold a rather extreme view given the range of possible beliefs among various other human societies. The Abrahamic anomaly can be seen in clear contrast to what one finds in the complex civilizations of Egypt or Mesoamerica, where the divine attributes of elaborate pantheons frequently take on a theriomorphic aspect. In Asia one finds cosmologies more akin to animism or pantheism, where the divinity or traces of some profound intelligence might be found hiding under any rock or around any corner. In pagan Europe and Pre-Columbian North America, the Living animal was to varying degrees regarded as divine, or as expressing A divine nature. And while it might seem reasonable *to some* to suppose on empirical grounds that the all-powerful God of Abraham was in some manner responsible for the colonizing success of the Semitic tradition, it is in any event the perpetuation of specific movements within this tradition that have justified pushing the whole Planet to the point of global humanitarian and ecological catastrophe. From just about any reasonable perspective, "success" is an odd description of this outcome.

Although one finds in the Christian tradition the Dove and the Lamb as central metaphors for the divinity, it is not with the metaphysics of doves or lambs one grapples when seeking an understanding of God. Although the dove represents Christ, the Seeker seeks Christ *the Man* as Son of God; the pigeons on a sidewalk in Manhattan or in the Piazza san Marco are perhaps treated with somewhat less regard than a cow wandering around Mumbai or Delhi.

How curious, then, that Solomon should direct us to the ant for special insights into our human nature.²² Considerably less majestic than the God

wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, "I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me." In like manner, [He said] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear would have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds of clear, pure, fine flour; and that apples, and seeds, and grass would produce in similar proportions; and that all animals, feeding then only on the productions of the earth, would become peaceable and harmonious, and be in perfect subjection to man. [Testimony is borne to these things in writing by Papias, an ancient man, who was a hearer of John and a friend of Polycarp, in the fourth of his books; for five books were composed by him. And he added, saying, 'Now these things are credible to believers. And Judas the traitor,' says he, 'not believing, and asking, "How shall such growths be accomplished by the Lord?" the Lord said, "They shall see who shall come to them." These, then, are the times mentioned by the prophet Isaiah: "And the wolf shall lie down with the lamb," etc. (Isa. xi. 6 ff.).']"

22 King James Bible, Proverbs 6:6-8. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."

of Abraham (in whose image we were created), or earthly Royalty with their palaces and gardens, these humble creatures are nevertheless highly organized social animals: some species go so far as to practice agriculture, cultivating certain fungi, and even deposit their dead in cemeteries. If one thinks about such things in scientific terms, one ought to consider that ants are, as a Family, older and therefore *more evolved* than we, and by far more successful at propagating their genes. On what grounds, then, do we presume to accept that the last 30,000 years of homo sapiens evolution represents the crowning achievement, as it were, of the whole animal Kingdom, reaching back, through the first caveman two million odd years ago, to the most distant past?

This Solomonic thread in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic-Semitic wisdom tradition resurfaces in Freemasonry with the image of the bee, which provides us with a model for how to “work together with ardor for the common good.”²³ Which is to say, the bee is industrious and well-organized like the ant, though less inclined to warfare, and also an ardent lover of beauty. These animal metaphors represent more than a religious appreciation of simplicity (as with the image of “the uncarved block” in Taoist literature); they also speak to *purpose*, both on an individual and on a social level. We also depend on the bee utterly: bees provide most of the food we eat, pollinating our crops and grains, and therefore what much of our livestock eats as well; and yet, there is good evidence that our ecological mismanagement is causing bee colonies to collapse. Some colonies have been observed to exhibit an adaptive “entombment” behavior²⁴ in response to opportunistic infections arising from exposure to a variety of industrial pesticides, such as the fungicide chlorothalonil. The neonicotinoid pesticide imidacloprid, marketed by the pharmaceutical company Bayer -- even at levels nearly undetectable to our science -- appears to facilitate infection with pathogens like the gut fungus *Nosema*.²⁵

VI.

In the conventional formulation of Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheism,

23 Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 1871. Ch. VIII: “A Masonic Lodge should resemble a bee-hive, in which all the members work together with ardor for the common good... To comfort misfortunes, to popularize knowledge, to teach whatever is true and pure in religion and philosophy, to accustom men to respect order and the proprieties of life, to point out the way to genuine happiness, to prepare for that fortunate period, when all the factions of the Human Family, united by the bonds of Toleration and Fraternity, shall be but one household,—these are labours that may well excite zeal and even enthusiasm.”

24 Fiona Harvey, “Bad Indicator: Entombment,” *The Guardian*, 4 April 2011. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/apr/04/honeybees-entomb-hives>.

25 Jeffery S. Pettis, Dennis vanEngelsdorp, Josephine Johnson, and Galen Dively, “Pesticide exposure in honey bees results in increased levels of the gut pathogen *Nosema*.” December 25, 2011. DOI 10.1007/s00114-011-0881-1. Note also that France banned several neonicotinoid pesticides in 1999, after 1/3 of their honey bee stock died off. In the US, neonicotinoids are regulated differently for industrial agriculture than they are for non-industrial uses, and in a non-industrial context, such pesticides are available through retail outlets at much higher concentrations than what is legal industrially.

the God of Abraham demands: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”²⁶ This Commandment, it should be pointed out, does not preclude the existence of lesser gods or divine agents -- only that the God of Abraham is supreme, and properly one’s foremost object of veneration and devotion. Indeed, the Bible is replete with the presence of other deities and divine agents, and not always in an unfavorable context. Solomon, who enlisted the help of the daemon Asmodeus in erecting the Second Temple,²⁷ also asks: “Doth not wisdom cry?”²⁸ This is the Greek Sophia, incorporated into the Semitic pantheon, as it were. In discussing His own relationship to John the Baptist, Christ also declares: “wisdom is justified of *her* children.”²⁹ The Roman Catholic tradition acknowledges multiple hierarchies of similar beings.

It is perhaps by some accident, some mutant anomaly of history -- by some peculiar mythology of conquest -- that the Abrahamic message did not develop more along the lines of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, where, for example, Indian missionaries were quite successful at overtly blending their Buddhist metaphysic with indigenous Tibetan pantheons, and at commingling with the Taoists in China to produce Ch’an (which is called Zen when practiced in Japan). Whereas the Semitic tradition prohibited idolatrous images, Hellenistic traditions prompted the first “anthropomorphized” statues of Buddha to appear on the Indian Subcontinent.

26 King James Bible, *Exodus* 20:3. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

27 Armand Kaminka, “The Origin of the Ashmedai Legend in the Babylonian Talmud.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 2, (Oct., 1922), pp. 221-224. University of Pennsylvania Press. “Herodotus tells in the third book of his history how, in the absence of Cambyses, Smerdis took possession of the throne of Persia ... Otanes... grew suspicious that the regent ‘who never quitted the citadel nor invited any of the noble Persians to his presence’ was not the son of Cyrus. Since his daughter Phaedyra was one of the wives of Cambyses, he sent to ask her ‘whether it was the true Smerdis who visited her as king’. To her answer that she had never seen Smerdis the son of Cyrus and therefore could not tell whether the ruler who had also become her husband was identical with him, he replied that she might examine, in his sleep, whether he had any ears. If he has no ears then he is not the royal prince but the magician Smerdis (whom Cyrus had in his life-time deprived of his ears for some atrocious crime) ... In later times the mythical necromancer Smerdai became the king of the demons, and in view of שְׂדֵיָהוּ [shee-dah v’shee-dote] mentioned in Eccles. 2.8 as being subject to Solomon he was drawn in for the purpose of obtaining the shamir.” *The Babylonian Talmud*, Gittin 68a, notes: “Shidah and shidoth’: Here [in Babylon] they translate as male and female demons.” Asmodeus is a profoundly ambiguous character; Gittin 68b continues: “Benaiahu said to Ashmedai, Why when you saw that blind man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied: It has been proclaimed of him in heaven that he is a wholly righteous man, and that whoever does him a kindness will be worthy of the future world. And why when you saw the drunken man going out of his way did you put him right? He replied, They have proclaimed concerning him in heaven that he is wholly wicked, and I conferred a boon on him in order that he may consume [here] his share [in the future].”

28 King James Bible, *Proverbs* 8:1-5. “Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.”

29 King James Bible, *Matthew* 11:19. “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

The conquest theology does not seem to be particularly Greek, though the Greeks undeniably engaged in conquest. Until Alexander reached India, Buddhism largely rejected “anthropomorphic” representations of the Buddha; instead, visual artists wishing to engage with the Buddhist tradition were inclined to the appropriation of the parasol and the wheel from the local Indian devotional sect of the “universal monarch” Chakravarti, or otherwise to images of a footprint or an empty throne to denote the vacated presence of He Who Has Escaped This World; or to depictions of a pair of deer which signified the presence of the historical Buddha engaged in spiritual instruction. It was with distinctly Hellenistic stylistic considerations that “anthropomorphic” statues of the Buddha began to flourish in the Asian world: the first images to appear were of the bodhisattva, the historical Siddhartha Gautama Sakyamuni, who has not yet attained Buddhahood.³⁰ Where Hellenistic culture created an opening in Buddhist thought through this form of visual representation, it stepped the Zoroastrian doctrines that the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition also received through the Babylonian Captivity. These Zoroastrian doctrines materialized for the Buddhists as images of the future “savior” Buddha Maitreya, akin to how these doctrines variously materialized as the Messiah and the Mahdi in the Semitic-Abrahamic traditions. This Hellenized Buddhism absorbed a Judeo-Christian eschatology, as it were, but not the Roman-Abrahamic eternal conquest theology³¹.

Although the stylistic conventions of early Buddhist art accomplished particular doctrinal (or political) purposes, they together accomplished for a time what the Semitic tradition attempted to accomplish with strictures against the idolatrous worship of graven imagery (the apparent intentions of the “jealous”³²

30 Ju-Hyung Rhi, “Bodhisattva to Buddha: The Beginning of Iconic Representation in Buddhist Art,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 54, No. 3/4 (1994), p. 209. “It is not clearly known when the word bodhisattva began to be used by the Buddhists. Some scholars believe that it already existed during Asoka’s time, and others suggest that it appeared during the first century B.C. In any case, it seems certain that the meaning and the usage of the word were fully established by the first and second centuries A.D., around which time the images with the inscription ‘Bodhisattva’ appeared in Mathura. There seems no doubt that the word Bodhisattva in early Mathura inscriptions meant Gautama before Enlightenment.”

31 Clement of Rome, *First Epistle*, Apostolic Fathers collection, 1st Century C.E., Chapter 37: “Let us then, men and brethren, with all energy act the part of soldiers, in accordance with His holy commandments. Let us consider those who serve as our generals, and with what order, obedience, and submissiveness they perform the things which are commanded them. All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage. Let us take our body for an example. The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the head; yea, the very smallest members of our body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all work harmoniously together, and are under one common rule for the preservation of the whole body.”

32 King James Bible, *Exodus* 20:4-5. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”

Hebrew God can be further contrasted against the condemnation of art Plato somewhat ironically puts into the mouth of Socrates,³³ where the Greek tragic and philosophical traditions intersected).

VII.

Paul Valéry wrote: “Once upon a time the likeness of a man or of an animal even though it had been seen to come from the hand of an artist, was considered not only as a living thing, immobile and crude though it was, but also endowed with supernatural powers. Stones and pieces of wood which did not even resemble human beings were worshipped as gods... and here is an extraordinary fact -- the cruder they were the more they were worshipped.”³⁴ This is, of course, a poetic accounting of history. Even a cursory examination of the cave paintings at Lascaux reveals with what extraordinary sensitivity the first known artists reproduced the anatomical details of the animals they lived with, hunted, and perhaps venerated.

Nevertheless, vestiges of the reverse-anthropomorphism to which Valéry makes reference can also be found in the Old Testament. The God of Abraham specifically discourages certain customs associated with the veneration of Asherah,³⁵ and elsewhere a heap of stones and a pillar serve as “witness” to an agreement between Jacob and Laban.³⁶ Perhaps the real threat

33 Plato, *Republic III*, from *Complete Works of Plato*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997. 401 b-d. “Is it, then, only poets we have to supervise, compelling them to make an image of a good character in their poems or else not to compose them among us? Or are we to give orders to other craftsmen, forbidding them to represent -- whether in pictures, buildings, or any other works -- a character that is vicious, unrestrained, slavish, and graceless? Are we to allow someone who cannot follow these instructions to work among us, so that our guardians will be brought up on images of evil, as if in a meadow of bad grass, where they crop and graze in many different places every day until, little by little, they unwittingly accumulate a large evil in their souls? Or must we rather seek out craftsmen who are by nature able to pursue what is fine and graceful in their work, so that our young people will live in a healthy place and be benefited on all sides, and so that something of those fine works will strike their eyes and ears like a breeze that brings health from a good place, leading them unwittingly, from childhood on, to resemblance, friendship, and harmony with the beauty of reason?”

34 Paul Valéry, “Leonardo and the Philosophers.” *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, New Directions, 1950. Page 114.

35 King James Bible, *II Kings* 21:7. “And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever.” This “image of the grove” was a sort of pole placed near an altar in veneration of the fertility goddess, consort of El.

36 King James Bible, *Genesis* 31:45-53. “And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said to his bretheren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed; and Mizpah, for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor,

against which the Semitic tradition reacts is not just that animals or objects will be worshipped instead of the Creator, but that animals and objects might be regarded as co-equal with the Creator in some manner. This notion surfaced in esoteric Renaissance Christianity, to the effect that there is no death, but only transmutation (as in the alchemical formulae); Giordano Bruno, whom the Inquisition burned at the stake in 1600, espoused an animistic philosophy along these lines. The heretical threat here is that if God is in Man as Man is in God, everything that happens -- good or bad -- is most importantly part of God and God's will; because God is the definition of perfection, this undermines both the Semitic tradition's conception of sin, but also of moral responsibility for one's actions. In relation to a metaphysic like Spinoza's, whatever God wills comes to pass *as God wills it* out of necessity; and thusly God willed into being this world that we live in *exactly as we experience it*. Since God is perfect Reason, he could only desire what is perfect. In a sense, this world is then identical to God's will, and perhaps even to God's essence as an identity between thought and fact (that is, this material world is identical to God's divine will).³⁷ The heresy in this view is the suggestion that God's acts could not have been otherwise, implying a constraint on the divine free will (Spinoza might deny that "God can make a rock that He can't lift" while the Church would affirm this as indeed possible). Pantheism and animism threaten all distinctions between objects and beings with a sort of ontological anarchy -- not a Chaos, but perhaps a similarly bewildering self-organization of concepts and relations (spiritual, material or metaphysical), giving stochastically to particular events in time an a-causal principle of non-local organization perhaps similar to what C.G. Jung described as the experience of "synchronicity."³⁸

In American education, biology classes teach that the key features of life are metabolism, organization, growth, and the ability to reproduce with variation. Surely the universe can metabolize -- we would not be here otherwise. We find remarkable order and regularity everywhere we look, and see matter and energy everywhere organized: we interact with this order, regularity, and symmetry, every time we accidentally knock a glass off a table, and find that it indeed hits the floor; and we are told that the universe has for quite some time been in the process of expanding. Modern science suggests that the universe may even

the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac."

37 Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*. Printed in *Works of Spinoza*, Dover Publications, 1955. Translated by R.H.M. Elwes. Book I, Proposition XXIX: "Whatever is, is in God... But God cannot be called a thing contingent. For... he exists necessarily, and not contingently." Book I, Proposition XXXIII: "Things could not have been brought into being by God in any manner or in any order different from that which has in fact obtained... It clearly follows from what we have said that things have been brought into being by God in the highest perfection, inasmuch as they have necessarily followed from a most perfect nature."

38 C.G. Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*. Bollingen Series XX, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volumes 8,9,11,13,18. 1991. Page 277. "The causality principle asserts that the connection between cause and effect is a necessary one. The synchronicity principle asserts that the terms of a meaningful coincidence are connected by simultaneity and meaning... besides the connection between cause and effect there is another factor in nature which expresses itself in the arrangement of events and appears to us as meaning. Although meaning is an anthropomorphic interpretation it nevertheless forms the indispensable criterion of synchronicity."

reproduce with variation, spawning multiple -- and potentially inhospitable³⁹ -- universes, which cumulatively constitute a “multiverse”⁴⁰

The threat of identifying the “sub-human” source of all potential with the “all-powerful” source of all purpose is addressed in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition by a sort of politicization of Man’s place in the universe, not wholly unlike what Deleuze and Guattari attempt with the animal in the world of Man. Angels and devils actively contend for our devotion to their causes. To maintain this politicization of Man requires the suppression of views suggesting that time and matter are inherently alive and intelligent in a manner co-equal to the divinity, or of questions as to whether the Universe might have consciousness (since it involves all the features of living things, including the consciousness of conscious beings). Without the distinction between Man and object -- which is to say, if mind and Man and matter might be equally expressions of the divine nature -- any sin against anything in the world is a sin against oneself and God, and to systematically exploit the world for the sake of commerce is, in a sense, to sell oneself into slavery.

VIII.

Though many traditional Roman Catholic dogmas have been supplanted or colonized by Protestant and scientific thinking in the West, many of these dogmas persist as scattered superstitions, now lacking any definite authority like the Church to lend them coherence.

Just as Protestant Christians retain the Roman Catholic Nicene Gospels as scripturally authoritative, the Western Zoroastrian-Judeo-Christian-Islamic apocalypse and the foretold messianic age persist even in atheist Marxism through the cataclysmic aspect of Marx’s class conflict, and the mythology of an oppressed class obtaining a preordained victory though a sort of historical

39 Alejandro Jenkins and Gilad Perez, *Scientific American*, January 2010. page 42: “The laws of physics... might therefore seem finely tuned to make our existence possible. Short of invoking a supernatural explanation, which would be by definition outside the scope of science, a number of physicists and cosmologists began in the 1970’s to try solving the puzzle by hypothesizing that our universe is just one of many existing universes, each with its own laws. According to this ‘anthropic’ reasoning, we might just occupy that rare universe where the right conditions happen to have come together to make life possible.”

40 Max Tegmark, “Parallel Universes,” *Parallel Universes: A Scientific American Special Report*, 2006. Page 3: “The simplest and most popular cosmological model today predicts that you have a twin in a galaxy 10 to the 10²⁸ meters from here... The estimate is derived from elementary probability and does not even assume speculative modern physics, merely that space is infinite (or at least sufficiently large) in size and almost uniformly filled with matter, as observations indicate.” Page 6: “Inflation is an extension of the big bang theory... Space as a whole is stretching and will continue doing so forever, but some regions of space stop stretching and form distinct bubbles, like gas pockets in a loaf of rising bread... The bubbles vary not only in their initial conditions but also in seemingly immutable aspects of nature... The quantum fluctuations that drive chaotic inflation could cause different symmetry breaking in different bubbles. Some might become four-dimensional, others could contain only two rather than three generations of quarks, and still others might have a stronger cosmological constant than ours.”

necessity.⁴¹ As the inquisitive rabbi replaced the ritualistic Jewish priesthood, the scientist has replaced the Catholic priesthood. The scientist retains the priest's position as the authoritative arbiter of Man's relation to absolute, objective truth. The modern, scientific physician, who serves as supreme mediator between this world and the next, garners a financial compensation similar to what the Medieval Catholic priesthood claimed for itself. When a biologist today is finished harvesting cells from a lab rat, the animal is "sacrificed." When an employee calls in sick for the day, it is customary to apologize and offer an explanation, as though the illness were a sin that must be confessed. The Creator as the pinnacle of Creation, and Man's mirror "image" as the pinnacle of the Creator's efforts⁴² -- this myth of Progress which assumes Man is the most sophisticated, "latest model" the Creator God (or evolution) has to offer -- reflects the terms of the Medieval Great Chain of Being. Similarly, the dogma of technological progress continually offers "revolutions" and "upgrades" that consumers are indoctrinated to assume are superior to whatever came before.

The *scala naturae*, which places Man just above the animals and quite a bit more below the Creator (and the Holy Animals, the Auphanim, the Aralim, the Shining Ones, Fiery Serpents, Malachim, Elohim, Archangels, Cherubim, and the Souls of Fire), assumes that the passage of time is inherently purpose-driven and hierarchical. There is no thought within this framework that social purpose can be directed, or that Progress can be measured quantitatively: it is Man as ultimately subject to the divine will. In this essentially Medieval scheme, Progress has not yet suggested that what is new necessarily *replaces* any antecedents, that innovation must amputate the past. In a Judeo-Christian-Islamic theological context, any such suggestion -- if taken to its logical extreme -- would suggest the heretical proposition that Man is superior to God simply in virtue of coming into being more recently. With the bourgeois revolutions came an institutional recognition of Man as conqueror of Destiny, and hence, systematic eugenics arose within the Roman-Nazi Third Reich bureaucracy as a rationalist solution to the problem of Fate in a cultural milieu that espouses free will.

If the urbanized, bourgeois revolutions, and their institutionalization of the nation-state, are evaluated in light of the founding of the Roman Empire (which fostered the Nicene appropriation and supplanting of the earlier Jewish scriptures), then the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans may have something to teach us about how a new order "dethrones" a conquered people, or "amputates" them from their past. Textile capitalists in Medieval Flanders displaced the feudal social order, in many ways ultimately to the advantage

41 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848. Sec. I. "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that will bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons -- the modern working class -- the proletarians."

42 King James Bible, *Genesis* 1:26. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

of the monarchy, which was subsequently able to consolidate power. The capitalist class responsible for the American Revolution later cast off the monarchy, and made provision against the reemergence of a feudal order.⁴³ In a more strictly religious context, the Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary in Mexico City was built by the Conquistadors atop an Aztec sacred site; and in the Mediterranean, the al Aqsa Mosque was built on the ruins of the Temple. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was, after Constantine, built atop a temple of Aphrodite.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the early Roman Empire suppressed the Jewish priestly class; Jewish animal sacrifice was outlawed; and in response, the rabbi emerged as a figure of authority among the Jewish population. The word “rabbi” has come to mean something similar to “teacher,” and with the rise of the rabbi as the central figure of religious Judaism, came the oral, interpretive scriptural tradition recorded in the Talmud. Through Talmudic study, the Torah becomes a dense allegory about a historical people overcoming a heritage of violence, to revel in meditation on scripture and *mitzvot*. It is with an understanding catalyzed by political and social turmoil that Paul calls events from the Books of Moses “an allegory,”⁴⁴ just about the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, and speaks of fulfilling the true spirit of the Law, where “the letter killeth.”⁴⁵ Perhaps as a remnant of this shift in the Jewish tradition towards rabbinicism, there is a tendency within the more recent Christian traditions to view Christ the Man as heralding peace on Earth, despite Christ’s explicitly having “come to send fire on the earth.”⁴⁶ The conquest theology of the Abrahamic traditions passed

43 *Constitution of the United States*, Article I, Section 9: “No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no person holding any office of profit or trust under them shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, emolument, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state.”

44 King James Bible, *Galatians*, 4:22-31. “For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, bretheren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, bretheren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

45 King James Bible, *II Corinthians*, 3:5-6. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of our selves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

46 King James Bible, *Luke* 12:49-51. “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.” Compare to *Gospel of Thomas* (10), published in Barntone and Meyer, *The Gnostic Bible*, Shambala Publications, 2009: “Yeshua said, I have thrown fire upon the world, and look, I am watching till it blazes.” See also *Matthew* 10:34-36; compare to *Thomas* (16): “People may

through Christianity, which fused with the Roman Empire after Constantine; it developed an elaborate bureaucracy, and set out on Crusades; and erupted again in the Italian Renaissance, under the influence of the scattered Sephardic Jewry, emerging as Western science and the Enlightenment myth of Progress. After Constantine, central elements of this conquest theology became a valuable tool of empire.

Technological Progress is an empire of statistics: a bureaucratized, industrial, state-sponsored myth designed to perpetuate a secular formulation of the Hebraic-Roman-Christian-Islamic conquest theology. The origins of planned obsolescence in the post-World War II permanent war economy can be compared to battlefield attrition, institutionalized as a manufacturing growth imperative.⁴⁷ The New World has been conquered, the American West has been conquered; what remains is a mythology of conquest that is now called Progress, and which claims marketshare as its domain; we can even quantify and record this Progress just as the past chroniclers of empires. This myth is enshrined in the US Constitution as a striving for 'a more perfect union.' And where we see that renters, women, and the descendants of slaves have, over time, managed to secure political enfranchisement in the US, the myth compels us to ignore that, in our contemporary, advanced American Democracy, some combination of consumerist political apathy, enforced ignorance, and justifiable anger ensures that a large portion of eligible voters opt not to exercise their voting rights.

Even the search for advanced biofuels omits that a modest change in cultural norms or personal habit would accomplish a substantial savings in fuel economy and a marked reduction in greenhouse gas emission at a lower cost in terms of financial investment, infrastructure maintenance, and socioeconomic complexity (and without the price consequences of putting food supplies in direct competition with the demand for inexpensive fuel). A vegetarian diet keeps as much carbon dioxide out of the air as an electric hybrid automobile -- compared to a traditional internal combustion engine -- but without the extra moving parts. A vegan diet even further contributes to the overall health of the industrialized human animal and its environment, as some 80% of antibiotics consumed in the US are given to livestock, and enter the human food chain through meat, milk, and eggs; along with other industrial chemicals, these antibiotics also enter the water supply through urine in agricultural runoff. This is no minor problem, since, after hygiene and sanitation, antibiotics represent one of the most powerful tools known to modern medicine. Should evolution think I have come to impose peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to impose conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there will be five in a house. There will be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone."

47 John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1967. Page 330: "A war without fighting neatly obviates the danger that fighting will stop... Obsolescence in a technological competition is a nearly perfect substitute for battlefield attrition. Formal agreement to arrest the competition is excluded by the belief that it is more dangerous than the competition. Once war involved the conscription of a large mass of low-wage participants on whom the dangers and discomforts of the battlefield fell with particular weight... The Cold War arouses no such antipathy."

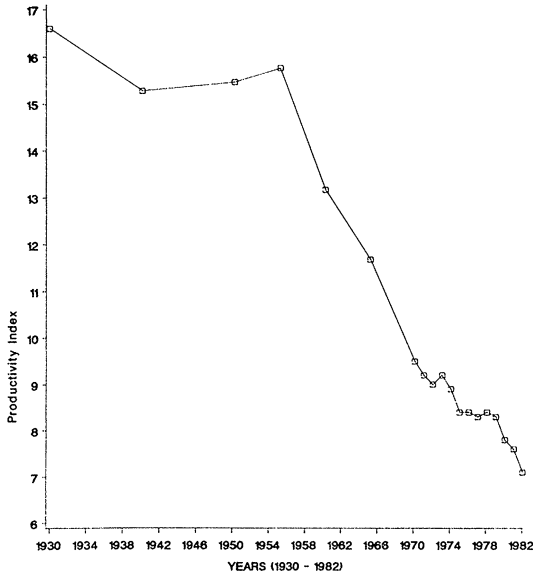


Fig. 11. Productivity of the U.S. health care system, 1930–82 (data from Worthington [1975: 5] and U.S. Bureau of the Census [1983: 73, 102]). Productivity index = (Life expectancy)/(National health expenditures as percent of GNP).

Source: *The Collapse of Complex Societies*.
Joseph A. Tainter, 1988 (22nd printing, 2011, Cambridge University Press)

produce drug-resistant bacteria in response to the over-use of antibiotics, the industrial diet would effectively undermine one of the most significant developments in the past 500 years of “social progress,” understood in terms of the material quality of life and overall health outcomes.

Under the modern system, the conquest theology is secularized as growth, Faith is rooted in technology, and the miraculous Powers are manifest in a pre-ordained technological solution to any conceivable problem (we have just to wait for science to deliver the right inventor to save us). An illustrious Framers of the US Constitution wrote, “the slave may appear to be degraded from the human rank, and classed with those irrational animals which fall under the legal denomination of property.”⁴⁸ If the slave and the “irrational” animal are classed together as properly subject to ownership, what are we to make of a citizen that labors unquestioningly under the institutional myth of Progress, for whom social life is just one orchestrated campaign in an eternal struggle to increase marketshare, no matter what the cost?

48 Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, *The Federalist* 54: “In being compelled to labor, not for himself, but for a master; in being vendible by one master to another master; and in being subject at all times to be restrained in his liberty and chastised in his body, by the capricious will of another, -- the slave may appear to be degraded from the human rank, and classed with those irrational animals which fall under the legal denomination of property. In being protected, on the other hand, in his life and his limbs, against the violence of all others, even the master of his labor and his liberty; and in being punishable himself for all violence committed against others, -- the slave is no less evidently regarded by law as a member of the society, not as a part of the irrational creation; as a moral person, not as a mere article of property.”

IX.

We are not without solutions to such quandaries. Our technology allows us to live in suburbs and rural areas, and still work in cities; and our diffuse population compels us to seek additional technologies to make this more convenient. Yet a modest change in cultural attitudes, such as acknowledging motorized transportation *generally* as a greater, more fundamental advantage than *individualized* transportation, would save us from the cycle of diminishing returns associated with efforts to improve automobiles -- by relying on existing cultural forms such as busses and trains. Mass transit and increased population density will be of paramount importance if our civilization is to approach sustainability in the near future. A major impediment to such change -- at least in many parts of the United States -- is the perception that mass transit represents a second-class mode of transportation. To the extent that this is true, this represents a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such changes, additionally, would lead to greater population densities: a proposition furthermore at odds with the expansionist mythology derived from the literary idealization of the American West.

Another cultural change that would reap enormous social benefits would be a modest reduction in meat consumption combined with a more conscientious attitude among consumers regarding the source of their animal food products.⁴⁹ If consumers were to eat less factory-farmed meat, greenhouse gas emissions would decrease significantly, chemical runoff from farms would be reduced, and the energy efficiency of food production would increase. These solutions involve conquering our own unexamined biases and attitudes, rather than conquering some technological limitation or more effectively subduing some part of the natural world.

Early Christian traditions understood the Apocalypse of John the Divine differently than the leaders of today's charismatic and mega-church movements. Augustine did not view the Millennium as some future cataclysmic event, but believed that he was already living in the Millennial Age: that of the Church.⁵⁰

49 Nathan Fiala, "The Greenhouse Hamburger." *Scientific American*, February 2009, pages 72-75. "Our diets and, specifically, the meat in them, cause more greenhouse gasses ... to spew into the atmosphere than either transportation or industry... producing a pound of beef protein for the table requires more than 10 pounds of plant protein -- with all the emissions of greenhouse gasses that grain farming entails... farms for raising animals produce numerous wastes that give rise to greenhouse gasses."

50 St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Chapter 7: "The evangelist John has spoken of these two resurrections in the book which is called the Apocalypse, but in such a way that some Christians do not understand the first of the two, and so construe the passage into ridiculous fancies... Those who, on the strength of this passage, have suspected that the first resurrection is future and bodily, have been moved, among other things, specially by the number of a thousand years, as if it were a fit thing that the saints should thus enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period, a holy leisure after the labors of the six thousand years since man was created... I myself, too, once held this opinion... It were a tedious process to refute these opinions point by point: we prefer proceeding to show how that passage of Scripture should be understood... the apostle saw in the Apocalypse 'an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a chain in his hand' ... the thousand years as an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to

The prophecy in the Apocalypse of John then pertains to the persecution of the Christians under the Romans,⁵¹ and the allegorical symbolism of the book becomes, as the Gnostics have supposed, a symbolic description of spiritual transformation subsequent to receiving the divine inspiration.⁵²

This message of an internal apocalypse, which the Gnostics adopted and fashioned into a whole scriptural genre pertaining to the recognition and liberation of the divine spark of life from within the imperfect body, elides with certain theological implications of animism or of an immanent deity: mainly, that the conquest of the world can be substituted with the conquest of the self. If the self, the world, and the deity are significantly co-equal, there is no point in lashing out at the world; violence to any part of the world is violence to the self.⁵³ Love of every part of the world is therefore love of both oneself and the divinity. Those who cherish the culture of technological growth would do well to give serious thought to the possibility that, rather than set out on missions of conquest, we may do better to rein our selves in.

mark the fullness of time. For a thousand is the cube of ten... Besides, if a hundred is sometimes used for totality, as when the Lord said by way of promise to him that left all and followed Him 'He shall receive in this world an hundredfold;' of which the apostle gives, as it were, an explanation when he says, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things,' -- for even of old it had been said, The whole world is the wealth of a believer, -- with how much greater reason is a thousand put for totality since it is the cube, while the other is only the square? And for the same reason we cannot better interpret the words of the psalm, 'He hath been mindful of His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,' than by understanding it to mean 'to all generations' ... The devil, then, is bound and shut up in the abyss that he may not seduce the nations from which the Church is gathered, and which he formerly seduced before the Church existed."

51 King James Bible, *Revelation* 2:10. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

52 King James Bible, *Revelation* 4:1-4, "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon as a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."

53 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, New Directions, 1971. Nihil obstat, Imprimatur, Ex parte ordanis, Imprimi potest. Chapter 17: "The world, with all its wars, is not yet hell. And history, however terrible, has another and a deeper meaning. For it is not the evil of history that is its significance and it is not by the evil of our time that our time can be understood. In the furnace of war and hatred, the City of those who love one another is drawn and fused together in the heroism of charity under suffering, while the city of those who hate everything is scattered and dispersed and its citizens are cast out in every direction, like sparks, smoke, and flame... When they try to cover the tedium of life by noise, excitement and violence -- the inevitable fruits of a life devoted to the love of values that do not exist -- they become something more than boring: they are scourges of the world and of society."

The distinction between Man and animal can be readily observed, theorized, legislated, or problematized. When we consider our “being-ness” as humans, we perceive quite easily that we can do things that other animals cannot. We furthermore postulate about what enables our special abilities; at times we equate miscegenation with bestiality; and we use methodological science to investigate, influence, and exploit life processes in terms of abstract mathematics and inanimate matter.

What these interrogations of the world reveal are frequently unclear in their implications -- and often the implications of these investigations are political in nature (or otherwise politicized in practice).

Perhaps more importantly, we uncritically assume this distinction between Man and animal is strictly to the advantage of the human race, and subsequently arrange the political implications of this distinction to represent this perceived natural advantage. Unfortunately, this distorted perspective limits our ability to formulate realistic assessments of our common condition.



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