

Du Fu: Poet, Sage, Historian

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Du Fu (712-770 CE) was a poet during a time of great political upheaval in China. He was born near Luoyang and spent much of his young adulthood in the Yanzhou region, finally settling down to a minor official position in Chang'an, the imperial capital. In 755 CE, An Lushan, a disgruntled general, led a rebellion against the Tang dynasty. The emperor was forced to flee Chang'an (modern Xian), and chaos reigned for the next eight years. For more than a year Du Fu was held captive in Chang'an by the rebels. After escaping, he made his way south, living for a time in a thatched cottage in Chengdu, and later at various places along the Yangtze River. His poetry is characterized by an intense love of nature, by elements of Chan Buddhism, and by a deep compassion for all those caught up in the turmoil of history. This is a longer post than usual. I have become fascinated by Du Fu.

Failing the Examinations

Du Fu (Tu Fu in the Wades Gilles transliteration system, the family name likely deriving from the name of a pear tree) was born in 712 CE near Luoyang, the eastern capital of the Tang Dynasty (Hung, 1952; Owen, 1981). The following map (adapted from Young, 2008, and Collet and Cheng, 2014) shows places of importance in his life:



Du Fu's father was a minor official. His mother appears to have died during his childhood, and Du Fu was raised by his stepmother and an aunt. Du Fu studied hard, but in 735 CE he failed the *jenshi* (advanced scholar) examinations. No one knows why: politics and spite may have played their part. He spent the next few years with his father who was then stationed in Yanzhou,

Du Fu met Li Bai (700-762 CE) in 744 CE. Despite the difference in their ages, the two poets became fast friends. However, they were only able to meet occasionally, their lives being separated by politics and war.

Du Fu attempted the *jenshi* examinations again in 746, and was again rejected. Nevertheless, he was able to obtain a minor position in the imperial civil service in Chang'an. This

allowed him to marry and raise a small family.

Taishan



We can begin our examination of Du Fu's poetry with one of the early poems written during his time in Yanzhou: *Gazing on the Peak* (737 CE). The peak is *Taishan* (exalted mountain), located in Northeastern China. Taishan is one of the Five Great Mountains (*Wuyue*) of ancient China. Today one can reach the summit by climbing up some 7000 steps (see illustration on the right), but in Du Fu's time the climb would have been more difficult. The following is the poem in printed Chinese characters (*Hànzì*) and in Pinyin transliteration:

望嶽

wàng yuè

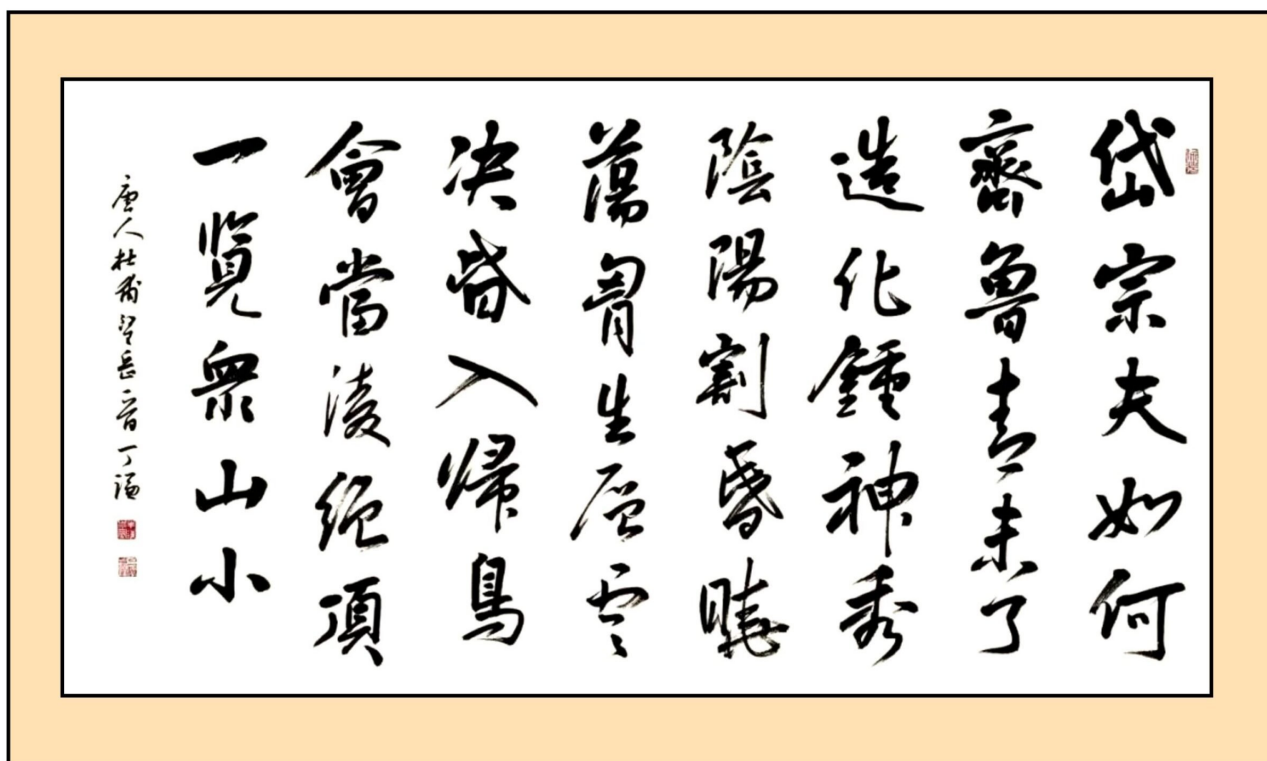
岱宗夫如何，
齊魯青未了。
造化鍾神秀，
陰陽割昏曉。
盪胸生曾雲，
決眴入歸鳥。
會當凌絕頂，
一覽眾山小。

dài zōng fū rú hé
qí lǚ qīng wèi liǎo
zào huà zhōng shén xiù
yīn yáng gē hūn xiǎo
dàng xiōng shēng céng yún
jué zì rù guī niǎo
huì dāng líng jué dǐng
yī lǎn zhòng shān xiǎo

The poem is in the *lǜshī* (regulated verse) form which requires eight lines (four couplets), with each line containing the same number of characters: 5- or 7-character *lǜshī* are the most common. Each line is separated into phrases, with a 5-character line composed of an initial 2-character phrase and a final 3-character phrase. The last words of each couplet rhyme. Rhyme in Chinese is based on the vowel sound. Within the lines there were complex rules for the tonality of the sounds (Zong Qi Cai, 2008, Chapter 8; Wai-lim Yip, 1997, pp 171-221). These rules do not always carry over to the way the characters are pronounced in modern Chinese. The following is a reading of the poem in Mandarin (from Librivox).

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/wang-yue-from-librivox.mp3>

Chinese poetry is directed at both the ear and the eye, and fine calligraphy enhances the appreciations of a poem. Ding Qian has written out Du Fu's *Wàng yuè* in beautiful cursive script (going from top down and from left to right):



The following is a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hinton, 2019, p 2):

gaze/ behold mountain

Daizong (ancient name for Taishan) then
like what

Qi *Lu* (regions near Taishan) green/blue
never end

create change concentrate divine beauty

Yin *Yang* (Taoist concepts of dark and light)

cleave dusk dawn

heave chest birth layer cloud

burst eye enter return bird

soon when reach extreme summit

one glance all mountain small.

And this is the English translation of Stephen Owen (2008, poem 1.2):

Gazing on the Peak

And what then is Daizong like? –
over Qi and Lu, green unending.
Creation compacted spirit splendors here,
Dark and Light, riving dusk and dawn.
Exhilarating the breast, it produces layers of cloud;
splitting eye-pupils, it has homing birds entering.
Someday may I climb up to its highest summit,
with one sweeping view see how small all other
mountains are



The interpretation of the poem requires some knowledge of its allusions. In the fourth line, Du Fu is referring to the *taijitu* symbol of Taoism (illustrated on the right) that contrasts the principles of *yin* (dark, female, moon) and *yang* (light, male, sun). Du Fu proposes that Taishan divides the world into two ways of looking. Some have suggested that the *taijitu* symbol originally represented the dark (north) side and the light (south) side of a mountain, and this idea fits easily with the poem.

All translators have had difficulty with the third couplet (reviewed by Hsieh, 1994). My feeling is that Du Fu is noticing layers of clouds at the mountain's upper reaches – the chest if one considers the mountain like a human body – and birds swooping around the peaks – where the eye sockets of the body would be. However, it is also possible that Du Fu is breathing heavily from the climb and that his eyes are

surprised by the birds. Perhaps both meanings are valid, with Du Fu and the mountain becoming one. Du Fu may have been experiencing the meditative state of Chan Buddhism, with a mind was “wide-open and interfused with this mountain landscape, no distinction between subjective and objective” (Hinton, 2019, p 6). One might also consider Du Fu’s mental state: at the time he wrote this poem he had just failed the *jenshi* exams. This might have caused some breast-beating and tears, as well as his final resolve to climb the mountain and see how small all his problems actually were.

The last couplet refers to Mencius’ description of the visit of Confucius to Taishan (Mengzi VIIA:24):

He ascended the Tai Mountain, and all beneath the heavens appeared to him small. So he who has contemplated the sea, finds it difficult to think anything of other waters, and he who has wandered in the gate of the sage, finds it difficult to think anything of the words of others.

Zhang’s Hermitage

During his time in Yanzhou Du Fu visited a hermit named Zhang near the Stonegate Mountain, one of the lesser peaks near Taishan. Zhang was likely a follower of the new Chan Buddhism, which promoted meditation as a means to empty the mind of suffering and allow the universal life force to permeate one’s being. Buddhism first came to China during the Han dynasty (206BCE – 220CE). Since many of the concepts of Buddhism were similar to those of Taoism, the new religion spread quickly (Hinton, 2020). A type of Buddhism that stressed the role of meditation began to develop in the 6th Century CE, and called itself *chan*, a Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit *dhyana* (meditation). In later years this would lead to the Zen Buddhism of Japan. There are many allusions to Buddhism and especially to Chan ideas in Du Fu’s poetry (Rouzer, 2020; Zhang, 2018)

Du Fu reportedly wrote the following poem on one of the walls of Zhang's hermitage. The poem is a seven-character *lǜshī*. The following is the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 1.4) and in pinyin:

題張氏隱居

tí zhāng shì yǐn jū

春山無伴獨相求

chūn shān wú bàn dú xiāng qiú

伐木丁丁山更幽。

fá mù dīng dīng shān gēng yōu

澗道餘寒歷冰雪，

jiàn dào yú hán lì bīng xuě

石門斜日到林丘。

shí mén xié rì dào lín qiū

不貪夜識金銀氣，

bù tān yè shí jīn yín qì

遠害朝看麋鹿遊。

yuǎn hài zhāo kàn mí lù yóu

乘興杳然迷出處，

chéng xīng yǎo rán mí chū chǔ

對君疑是泛虛舟。

duì jūn yí shì fàn xū zhōu

The following is a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hinton, 2019, p 22):

inscribe	Zhang	family	recluse	
house				
spring	mountain	absence	friend	alone
you	search			
chop	tree	crack	crack	mountain
mystery				again
creek	pathway	remnant	cold	pass
ice	snow			
stone	gate	slant	sun	reach
place				forest
no	desire	night	know	gold
breath/spirit				silver
far	injure	morning	see	deer
wander				deer

ride burgeon dark thus confuse leave
place
facing you suspect this drift empty
boat.

And this is a translation by Kenneth Rexroth (1956):

Written on the Wall at Chang's Hermitage

It is Spring in the mountains.
I come alone seeking you.
The sound of chopping wood echos
Between the silent peaks.
The streams are still icy.
There is snow on the trail.
At sunset I reach your grove
In the stony mountain pass.
You want nothing, although at night
You can see the aura of gold
And silver ore all around you.
You have learned to be gentle
As the mountain deer you have tamed.
The way back forgotten, hidden
Away, I become like you,
An empty boat, floating, adrift.

Notable in the poem is the idea of *wú* (third character) which can be translated as "absence, nothing, not" (Hinton, 2019, p 24) This is an essential concept of Chan Buddhism – the emptying of the mind so that it can become a receptacle for true awareness. The third and fourth characters of the first line might be simply translated as "alone (without a friend)," but one might also venture "with absence as a companion" or "with an empty mind." This fits with the image of the empty boat at the end of the poem.

Zheng Qian, a drinking companion of Li Bai and Du Fu, suggested the idea of combining poetry, painting and

calligraphy. The Emperor was impressed and called the combination *sānjué* (three perfections) (Sullivan, 1974). Li Bai and Du Fu likely tried their hand at painting and calligraphy but no versions of their *sānjué* efforts have survived. The Ming painter and calligrapher Wang Shimin (1592–1680 CE) illustrated the second couplet of Du Fu's poem from Zhang's hermitage in his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts now at the Palace Museum in Beijing.



澗道餘寒歷冰雪
石門斜日到林止

乙巳臘月寫

少陵詩意十

二幀似

旭成賢甥時年

七十有四時敘



The An Lushan Rebellion

Toward the end 755 CE, An Lushan, a general on the northern frontier rebelled against the empire and captured the garrison town of Fanyang (or Jicheng) located in what is now part of Beijing. Within a month the rebels captured Luoyang. The emperor and much of his court fled Chang'an, travelling through the Qinling Mountains to find sanctuary in the province of Shu. The city of Chang'an fell to the rebels in the middle of 756 CE.

Below is shown a painting of *Emperor Ming-Huang's Flight to Shu*. Though attributed to the Tang painter Li Zhaodao (675-758 CE), this was actually painted in his style several hundred years later during the Song Dynasty. Shu is the ancient name for what is now known as Sichuan province. This masterpiece of early Chinese painting is now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Two enlargements are included: the emperor with his red coat is shown at the lower right; at the lower left advance members of his entourage begin climbing the mountain paths.



The rebellion lasted for eight long years. The northern part of the country was devastated. Death from either war or famine was widespread. Censuses before and after the rebellion suggested a death toll of some 36 million people, making it one of the worst catastrophes in human history. However, most scholars now doubt these numbers and consider the death toll as closer to 13 million. Nevertheless, it was a murderous time.

Moonlit Night

At the beginning of the rebellion, Du Fu managed to get his family to safety in the northern town of Fuzhou, but he was himself held captive in Chang'an. Fortunately, he was not considered important enough to be executed, and he finally managed to escape in 757 CE. The following shows a poem from 756 CE in characters (Owen, 2008, poem 4.18), pinyin transcription, and character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008):

月夜	yuè yè	moon night
今夜鄜州月，	jīn yè fū zhōu yuè	this night Fu Zhou moon
閨中只獨看。	guī zhōng zhǐ dú kàn	woman's room only alone watch
遙憐小兒女，	yáo lián xiǎo ér nǚ	far pity little boy girl
未解憶長安。	wèi jiě yì cháng ān	not understand remember Chang'an
香霧雲鬟濕，	xiāng wù yún huán shī	fragrant mist cloud hair wet
清輝玉臂寒。	qīng huī yù bì hán	clear brightness jade arm cold
何時倚虛幌，	hé shí yǐ xū huǎng	what time lean empty curtain
雙照淚痕乾。	shuāng zhào lèi hén gān	pair shine tears trace dry

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/yue-y-e-from-librivox.mp3>

Vikam Seth (1997) translated the poem keeping the Chinese rhyme scheme: the last character rhymes for all four couplets:

Moonlit Night

In Fuzhou, far away, my wife is watching
The moon alone tonight, and my thoughts fill
With sadness for my children, who can't think
Of me here in Changan; they're too young still.

Her cloud-soft hair is moist with fragrant mist.
In the clear light her white arms sense the chill.
When will we feel the moonlight dry our tears,
Leaning together on our window-sill?

Alec Roth wrote a suite of songs based on Vikam Seth's translations of Du Fu. The following is his setting for Moonlit Night with tenor Mark Padmore:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/06-Songs-In-Time-of-War_-Moonlit-Nig.mp3

David Young (2008) provides a free-verse translation:

Tonight
in this same moonlight
my wife is alone at her window
in Fuzhou
I can hardly bear
to think of my children
too young to understand
why I can't come to them
her hair
must be damp from the mist
her arms
cold jade in the moonlight
when will we stand together
by those slack curtains
while the moonlight dries
the tear-streaks on our faces?

The poem may have been written or at least conceived during the celebration of the full moon in the autumn. Families customarily viewed the moon together and Du Fu imagines his wife viewing the moon alone. The mention of the wife's chamber in the second line may refer to either her actual bedroom or metonymically to herself as the inmost room in Du Fu's heart (Hawkes, 1967). David Young (2008) remarks that this may be

“the first Chinese poem to address romantic sentiments to a wife,” instead of a colleague or a courtesan.

David Hawkes (1967) notes the parallelism of the third couplet:

‘fragrant mist’ parallels ‘clear light,’ ‘cloud hair’ parallels ‘jade arms,’ and ‘wet’ parallels ‘cold’

Spring View

Spring View (or *Spring Landscape*), the most famous poem written by Du Fu in Chang’an during the rebellion, tells how nature persists despite the ravages of effects of war and time. Subjective emotions and objective reality become one. The character *wàng* (view, landscape) can mean both the act of perceiving or what is actually perceived. In addition, it can sometimes mean the present scene or what is to be expected in the future (much like the English word “prospect”). The illustration below shows the text in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 4.25), in pinyin and in a character-by-character translation (adapted from Hawkes, 1967, Alexander, 2008, and Zong-Qi Cai, 2008):

春望	chūn wàng	spring view
國破山河在，	guó pò shān hé zài	country broken mountain river remain
城春草木深。	chéng chūn cǎo mù shēn	city spring grass trees deep
感時花濺淚，	gǎn shí huā jiàn lèi	feel moment flower splash tear
恨別鳥驚心。	hèn bié niǎo jīng xīn	regret/hate parting bird startle heart
烽火連三月，	fēng huǒ lián sān yuè	beacon fires join three months
家書抵萬金。	jiā shū dǐ wàn jīn	family letters worth ten-thousand gold
白頭搔更短，	bái tóu sāo gèng duǎn	white head scratch become thin
渾欲不勝簪	hún yù bù shēng zān	simply about not bear hairpin

The following is a reading of the poem from the website

associated with *How to Read Chinese Poetry* (ZongQi-Cai, 2008, poem 8.1):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/c8.1-spring-scene.mp3>

The next illustration shows the poem as written by three calligraphers. All versions read from top down and from right to left. On the left is standard script by Anita Wang; on the right the calligraphy by Lii Shiuh Lou is gently cursive. At the bottom the calligraphy by an anonymous calligrapher is unrestrained: it accentuates the root of the growing grass (8th character) and the radicals that compose the character for regret/hate (16th character) fly apart.

國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺淚
恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵萬金
白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪

乙酉春尾 姜裕緒書於亞城



國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺淚
恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵萬金
白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪

杜甫春望 辛丑臘月五心銘



國破山河在
城春草木深
感時花濺淚
恨別鳥驚心
烽火連三月
家書抵萬金
白頭搔更短
渾欲不勝簪

杜甫春望
歲次壬子

The following are two translations, the first by David Hinton, which uses an English line of a constant length to approximate the Chinese 5-character line (2020a):

The country in ruins, rivers and mountains
continue. The city grows lush with spring.

Blossoms scatter tears for us, and all these
separations in a bird's cry startle the heart.

Beacon-fires three months ablaze: by now
a mere letter's worth ten thousand in gold,

and worry's thinned my hair to such white
confusion I can't even keep this hairpin in.

A second translation, with preservation of the rhyme scheme and phrasal structure, is by Keith Holyoak (2015)

The state is in ruin;
yet mountains and rivers endure.
In city gardens
weeds run riot this spring.

These dark times
move flowers to sprinkle tears;
the separations
send startled birds on the wing.

For three months now
the beacon fires have burned;
a letter from home
would mean more than anything.

I've pulled out
so many of my white hairs
too few are left
to hold my hatpin in!

The second couplet has been interpreted in different ways.

Most translations (including the two just quoted) consider it as representing nature's lament for the evil times. For example, Hawkes (1967) suggests that "nature is grieving in sympathy with the beholder at the ills which beset him." However, Michael Yang (2016) proposes that "In times of adversity, nature may simply be downright uncaring and unfriendly, thereby adding to the woes of mankind." He translates the couplet

Mourning the times, I weep at the sight of flowers;
Hating separation, I find the sound of birds
startling.

The last two lines of the poem refer the hair-style of the Tang Dynasty: men wore their hair in a topknot, and their hats were "anchored to their heads with a large hatpin which passed through the topknot of hair" (Hawkes, 1967). Most interpreters have been struck by the difference between the solemn anguish of the poem's first six lines, and the self-mockery of the final couplet (Hawkes, 1967, p 46; Chou, 1995, p 115). This juxtaposition of the tragic and the pitiable accentuates the poet's bewilderment.

The Thatched Cottage

Disillusioned by the war and by the politics of vengeance that followed, Du Fu and his family retired to a thatched cottage in Chengdu, where he lived from 759-765. A replica of this cottage has been built there in a park celebrating both Du Fu and Chinese Poetry:





Many of the poems that Du Fu wrote in Chengdu celebrated the simple joys of nature. He often used isolated quatrains to find parallels between his emotions and the world around him. This brief form called *juéjù* (curtailed lines) was widely used by his colleagues Li Bai (701–762) and Wang Wei (699–759). The form consists of two couplets juxtaposed in meaning and rhyming across their last character (Wong, 1970; Zong-Qi Cai, 2008, Chapter 10). The following poem (Owen, 2008, poem 9.63) describing willow-catkins (illustrated on the right) and sleeping ducks gives a deep feeling of peace. These are the Chinese characters and pinyin transcription followed by the character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008):

糝徑楊花鋪白氈，
點溪荷葉疊青錢。
筍根雉子無人見，
沙上鳧雛傍母眠。

sǎn jìng yáng huā pū bái zhān
diǎn xī hé yè dié qīng qián
sǔn gēn zhì zǐ wú rén jiàn
shā shàng fú chú bàng mǔ mián

grain	path	poplar/willow	blossom	pave		
white	carpet					
little	stream	lotus	leaves	pile	green	
money						
bamboo	shoot	root	sprout	no	person	see
sand	on	duckling	beside	mother	sleep	

The following translation is by Burton Watson (2002):

Willow fluff along the path spreads a white carpet;
lotus leaves dot the stream, plating it with green
coins.

By bamboo roots, tender shoots where no one sees them;
on the sand, baby ducks asleep beside their mother.

Shui Chien-Tung provided the following calligraphy for the poem (Cooper, 1973). He used aspects of the ancient scripts (circles, curves and dots) in some of the characters to give a sense of simplicity and timelessness. The illustration shows the calligraphy of the poem on the left and the evolution of the characters *yáng* (willow, poplar) and *fú* (duck) on the right.

鳬鵲傍母眼
 疊青錢
 筍根稚子無人見
 沙上
 糝徑楊花鋪白氈
 點溪荷葉

yáng
(willow)

楊

楊

楊

杨

Bronze
Inscription

Seal
Script

Traditional

Simplified

fú
(duck)

𪇑

𪇑

鳬

鳬

Another quatrain from Chengdu describes a night scene on the river. The following shows the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 13.61), in pinyin, and in a character-by-character translation (mine):

江動月移石, jiāng dòng yuè yí shí
 溪虛雲傍花。 xī xū yún bàng huā
 鳥棲知故道, niǎo qī zhī gù dào
 帆過宿誰家。 fān guò sù shuí jiā

river move moon change rock
 stream empty cloud beside flower
 bird perch understand old Dao
 sail pass stay(lodge) who home

This is the translation by J. P. Seaton (Seaton & Cryer,

1987):

The River moves, moon travels rock,
Streams unreal, clouds there among the flowers.
The bird perches, knows the ancient Tao
Sails go: They can't know where.

As the river flows by, the moon's reflection slowly travels across the rocks near the shore. The water reflects the clouds between the lilies. A bird on a branch understands the nature of the universe. A boat passes, going home we know not where.

The poem conveys a sense of the complexity of the world where reflections and reality intermingle, a desire to understand the meaning of our life, and a fear that time is passing and we do not know where it will take us. All this in twenty characters. Such concision is extremely difficult in English. An attempt:

River and rocks reflect the moon
and clouds amid the lilies
resting birds understand the way
sails pass seeking home somewhere.

The following shows a painting by Huang Yon-hou to illustrate the poem. This was used as the frontispiece (and cover) of the book *Bright Moon, Perching Bird* (Seaton & Cryer, 1987). On the right is calligraphy of the poem by Mo Ji-yu.



江動月移石溪虛雲傍花鳥樓知
故道帆過宿誰家
桂林同源書

Above the Gorges

In 765 CE Du Fu and his family left Chengdu and travelled eastward on the Yangtze River. The region of Luoyang had been recently recovered by imperial forces and Du Fu was perhaps trying to return home (Hung, 1952). He stayed for a while in Kuizhou (present day Baidicheng) at the beginning of the Three Gorges (*Qutang, Wu and Xiang*).

While there Du Fu wrote a series of meditations called *Autumn Thoughts* (or more literally *Stirred by Autumn*). This is the second of these poems in Chinese characters and in pinyin:

夔府孤城落日斜，
每依北斗望京華。
聽猿實下三聲淚，
奉使虛隨八月槎。
畫省香爐違伏枕，
山樓粉堞隱悲笳。
請看石上藤蘿月，
已映洲前蘆荻花。

kuí fǔ gū chéng luò rì xié
měi yī běi dòu wàng jīng huá
tīng yuán shí xià sān shēng lèi
fèng shǐ xū suí bā yuè chá
huà shěng xiāng lú wéi fú zhěn
shān lóu fěn dié yǐn bēi jiā
qǐng kàn shí shàng téng luó yuè
yǐ yìng zhōu qián lú dí huā

A character-by-character translation (Alexander, 2008) is:

Kui prefecture lonely wall set sun slant
Every rely north dipper gaze capital city
Hear ape real fall three sound tear
Sent mission vain follow eight month raft
Picture ministry incense stove apart hidden pillow
Mountain tower white battlements hide sad reed-
whistle
Ask look stone on [Chinese wisteria] moon
Already reflect islet before rushes reeds flowers

The following is Stephen Owen's translation (Owen, 2008 poem 17.27):

On Kuizhou's lonely walls setting sunlight slants,
then always I trust the North Dipper to lead my gaze to
the capital.
Listening to gibbons I really shed tears at their third
cry,
accepting my mission I pointlessly follow the eighth-
month raft.
The censor in the ministry with portraits eludes the
pillow where I lie,
ill towers' white-plastered battlements hide the sad reed
pipes.

Just look there at the moon, in wisteria on the rock,
it has already cast its light by sandbars on flowers of
the reeds.

The poem is striking in the difference between the first three couplets and the last. At the beginning of the poem Du Fu is feeling regret that he is not in Chang'an which is located due north of Kuizhou (in the direction of the Big Dipper which points to the North Star). Owen notes that "There was an old rhyme that a traveler in the gorges would shed tears when the gibbons cried out three times." The eighth month raft may refer to another old story about a vessel that came every eight months and took a man up to the Milky Way. Owen commented on the third couplet that "The "muralled ministry" is where were located the commemorative portraits of officers, civil and military, who had done exceptional service to the dynasty." Incense was burned when petitions were presented. The final couplet disregards all the preceding nostalgia and simply appreciates the beauty of the moment.

The Ming painter Wang Shimin illustrated this final couplet in one of the leaves from his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts.

請看石上藤蘿月
已映洲前蘆荻花



Later in Kuizhou, Du Fu entertained a librarian named Li who was returning north to take up an appointment in Chang'an. The following is the beginning of a poem (Owen, 2008, poem 19.34) describing Li's departure in Chinese characters and in pinyin:

青簾白舫益州來，	qīng lián bái fǎng yì zhōu lái
巫峽秋濤天地回。	wū xiá qiū tāo tiān dì huí
石出倒聽楓葉下，	shí chū dǎo tīng fēng yè xià
櫓搖背指菊花開。	lǔ yáo bèi zhǐ jú huā kāi

A character-by-character translation is:

blue/green	curtain	white	boat/raft	Yizhou
arrive				
Wu	gorge	autumn	waves	heaven/sky
earth/ground	turn (around)			
stone/rock	leave/exit	fall	listen	maple
leaf	down			
scull/oar	swing	carry	point	chrysanthemum
flower	open/blume			

The following is Stephen Owen's translation:

When the white barge with green curtains came from Yizhou,
with autumn billows in the Wu Gorges, heaven and earth were
turning.
Where rocks came out, from below you listened to the leaves
of maples falling,
as the sweep moved back and forth you pointed behind to
chrysanthemums in bloom.

The Ming painter Wang Shimin illustrated the second couplet in one of the leaves from his album Du Fu's Poetic Thoughts. The painting shows the bright red leaves of the maples. In front of the riverside house one can see the multicolored chrysanthemums that Li is pointing to. Harmony exists between

the wild and the cultivated.

石出倒懸楓葉下
櫓搖背指菊苔開



On the River

After his sojourn in Kuizhou, Du Fu and his family continued their journey down the Yangtze River. However, the poet was ill and was unable to make it beyond Tanzhou (now Changsha) where he died in 770 CE. No one knows where he is buried. In the 1960's radical students dug up a grave purported to be his to "eliminate the remaining poison of feudalism," but found the grave empty.

One of Du Fu's last poems was *Night Thoughts While Travelling*. The following is the poem in Chinese characters (Owen, 2008, poem 14.63) and in pinyin (Alexander, 2008):

旅夜書懷	lǚ yè shū huái	journey night write think
細草微風岸，	xì cǎo wēi fēng àn	gently grass soft wind shore
危檣獨夜舟。	wēi qiáng dú yè zhōu	tall mast alone night boat
星垂平野闊，	xīng chuí píng yě kuò	star fall flat fields broad
月湧大江流。	yuè yǒng dà jiāng liú	moon rises great river flows
名豈文章著，	míng qǐ wén zhāng zhù	name not literary works mark
官應老病休。	guān yìng lǎo bìng xiū	official should old sick stop
飄零何所似，	piāo piāo hé suǒ sì	flutter flutter what place seem
天地一沙鷗。	tiān dì yī shā ōu	heaven earth one sand gull

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/night-thoughts-from-librivox.mp3>

Holyoak (2015) provides a rhymed translation:

The fine grass
by the riverbank stirs in the breeze;
the tall mast
in the night is a lonely sliver.

Stars hang
all across the vast plain;
the moon bobs
in the flow of the great river.

My poetry
has not made a name for me;
now age and sickness
have cost me the post I was given.

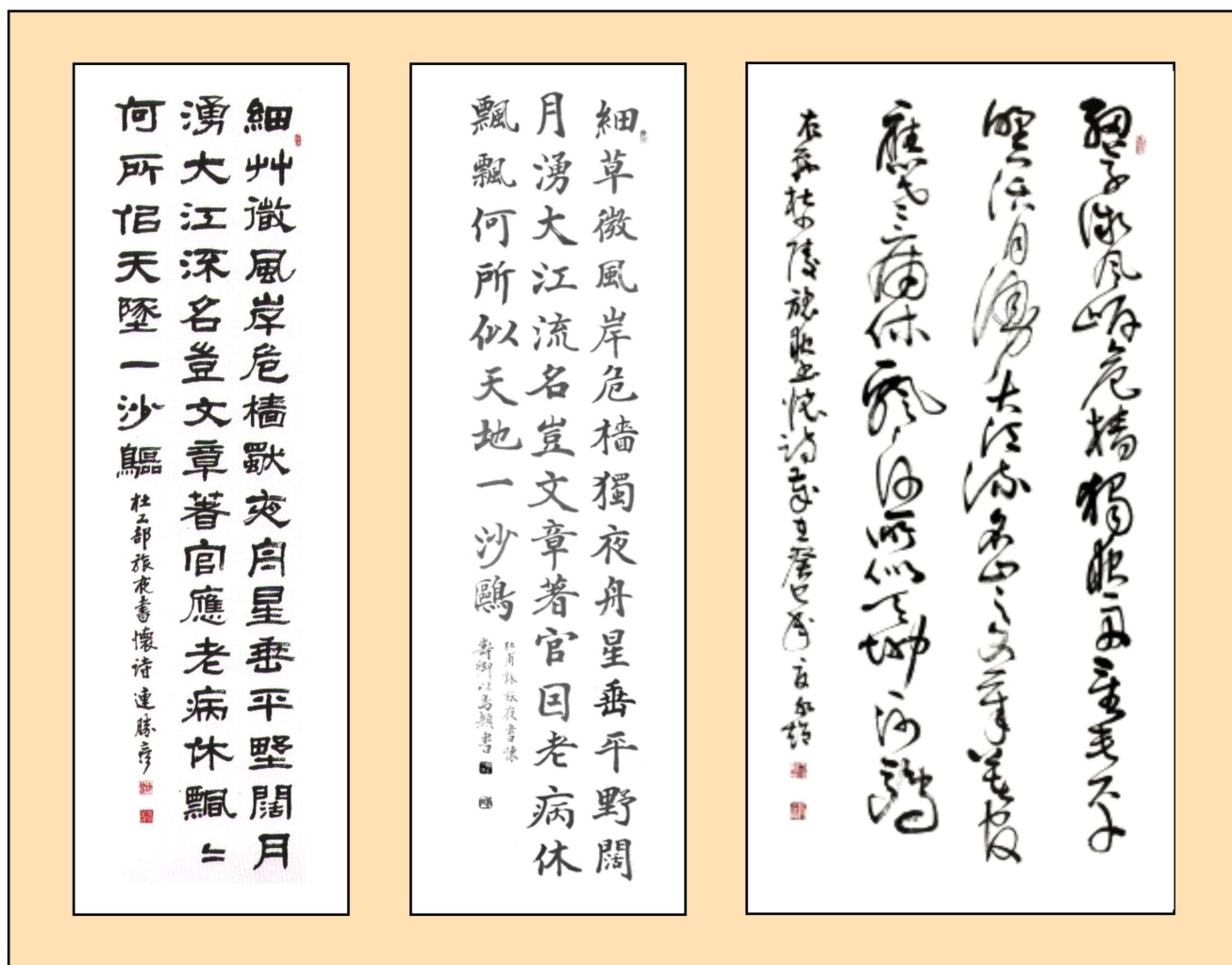
Drifting, drifting,
what do I resemble?
A lone gull
lost between earth and heaven.

Kenneth Rexroth (1956) translates the poem in free verse:

Night Thoughts While Travelling

A light breeze rustles the reeds
Along the river banks. The
Mast of my lonely boat soars
Into the night. Stars blossom
Over the vast desert of
Waters. Moonlight flows on the
Surging river. My poems have
Made me famous but I grow
Old, ill and tired, blown hither
And yon; I am like a gull
Lost between heaven and earth.

The following shows the poem in calligraphy with three styles. On the left the poem is written in clerical script, in the center in regular script and on the right is unrestrained cursive script. All examples were taken from Chinese sites selling calligraphy.



Changing Times

During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) the role of literature, and poetry in particular, in society changed dramatically (Owen, 2011):

In the 650s, literature was centered almost entirely in the imperial court; by the end of the era literature had become the possession of an educated elite, who might serve in government, but whose cultural life was primarily outside the court.

During Du Fu's lifetime, poetry became no longer a part of the ancient traditions; rather it began to be concerned with the present and with the personal. Lucas Bender (2021) describes the traditional role of poetry in a society following the

precepts of Confucianism:

Most people ... would be incapable on their own of adequately conceptualizing the world or perfectly responding to its contingency, and therefore needed to rely on the models left by sages and worthies. Many of these models were embodied in texts, including literary texts, which could thus offer an arena for ethical activity. Poetry, for example, was understood to offer models of cognition, feeling, and commitment that would ineluctably shape readers' understanding of and responses to their own circumstances. One way of being a good person, therefore, involved reading good poetry and writing more of it, thereby propagating the normative models of the tradition in one's own time and transmitting them to the future. (p 317)

Du Fu found himself bewildered by the state of the world. He sought to convey this confusion rather than explain it:

Du Fu doubts the possibility of indefinitely applicable moral categories. The conceptual tools by which we make moral judgments, he suggests, are always inherited from a past that can – and, in a world as various and changeable as ours has proven to be, often will – diverge from the exigencies of the present. As a result, not only are our values unlikely to be either universal or timeless; more important, if we pay careful attention to the details of our experience, they are unlikely to work unproblematically even here and now. (Bender, 2021, p 319)

The complexity of Du Fu's poetry – the difficulty in understanding some of his juxtapositions – becomes a challenge. The past provides no help in the interpretation. We must figure out for themselves what relates the mountain, the clouds and the poet's breathing in the first poem we considered. And in the last poem we must try to locate for ourselves the place of the gull between heaven and earth.

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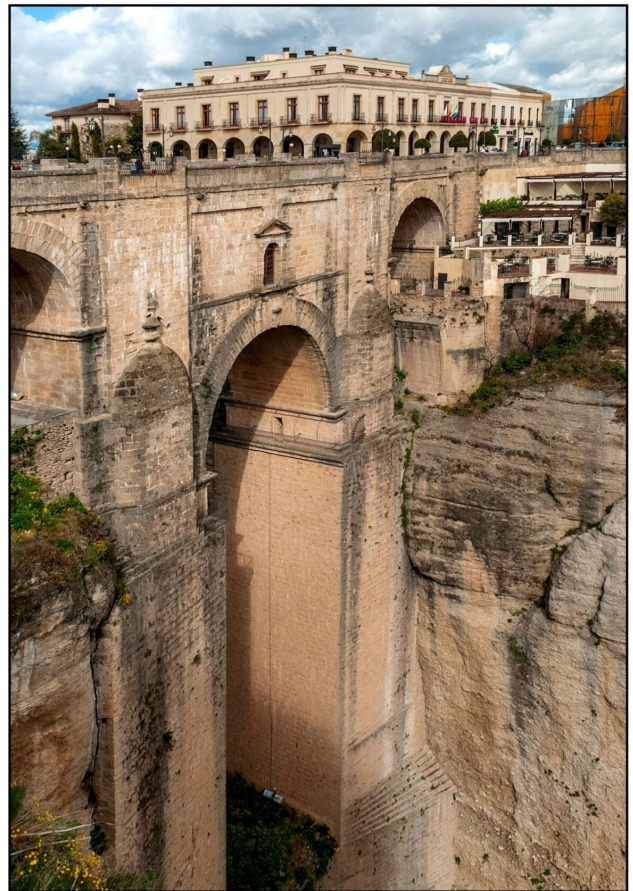
History, Myth and Fiction

This post describes some of the events that occurred in Ronda, a town in southern Spain, during the summer of 1936. After the Spanish Civil War broke out, Anarchists quickly took control of the town, and murdered many supporters of the Nationalist cause. Two months later, advancing Nationalist forces captured Ronda, and drove most of its people from their homes. Those that refused to leave suffered bloody reprisals. These events quickly became mythic rather than historic. In one story, the Anarchists had murdered the town's Falangists by having them beaten to death in the town's plaza and then thrown into the canyon that cuts through the center of the town. Ernest Hemingway recounted this version in his 1940 novel *For Whom*

the Bell Tolls. However, most historians now agree that this never happened.

Ronda

Ronda is one of the most beautiful of the *pueblos blancos* ("white towns") perched on the inland hills of Andalusia. The name comes from the buildings that were white-washed to protect them from the heat of the sun. Through the center of Ronda runs the Guadalevin River, which has carved through the limestone cliffs a steep-walled canyon, *el tajo*, reaching depths of more than 100 meters. The most striking bridge over the river is the *Puente Nuevo* constructed in 1793 at the point where the canyon opens into the huge valley know as *la caldera* (cauldron) The following illustration shows the bridge viewed from the West (left) and from the Southeast (right).



The large building just to the north of the bridge used to be Ronda's *casa consistorial* (town hall) where the *ayuntamiento*

or local council met. In the 1990s this was converted into a *parador* (state-owned luxury hotel). The following illustration shows the old city hall with its arcades facing the large town square. On the far left can be seen a low wall looking over the canyon.



Ronda has many other luxury hotels. The Hotel Reina Victoria, a summer resort for the English stationed in Gibraltar, was built on the cliff overlooking *la caldera* in 1906. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke stayed there for several months in the winter of 1912-1913. The gardens beside the hotel have a commemorative statue of Rilke gazing out over valley (shown below in a photograph by Bryan Appleyard).



In Ronda, Rilke continued working on a set of poems that would not be complete until ten more years had passed – the *Duino Elegies*. He was also able to compose several poems about Spain. In the third part of a poem called *The Spanish Trilogy* he praised the peasants he could see in the valley, hoping that he might become as attuned to the universe as a simple shepherd:

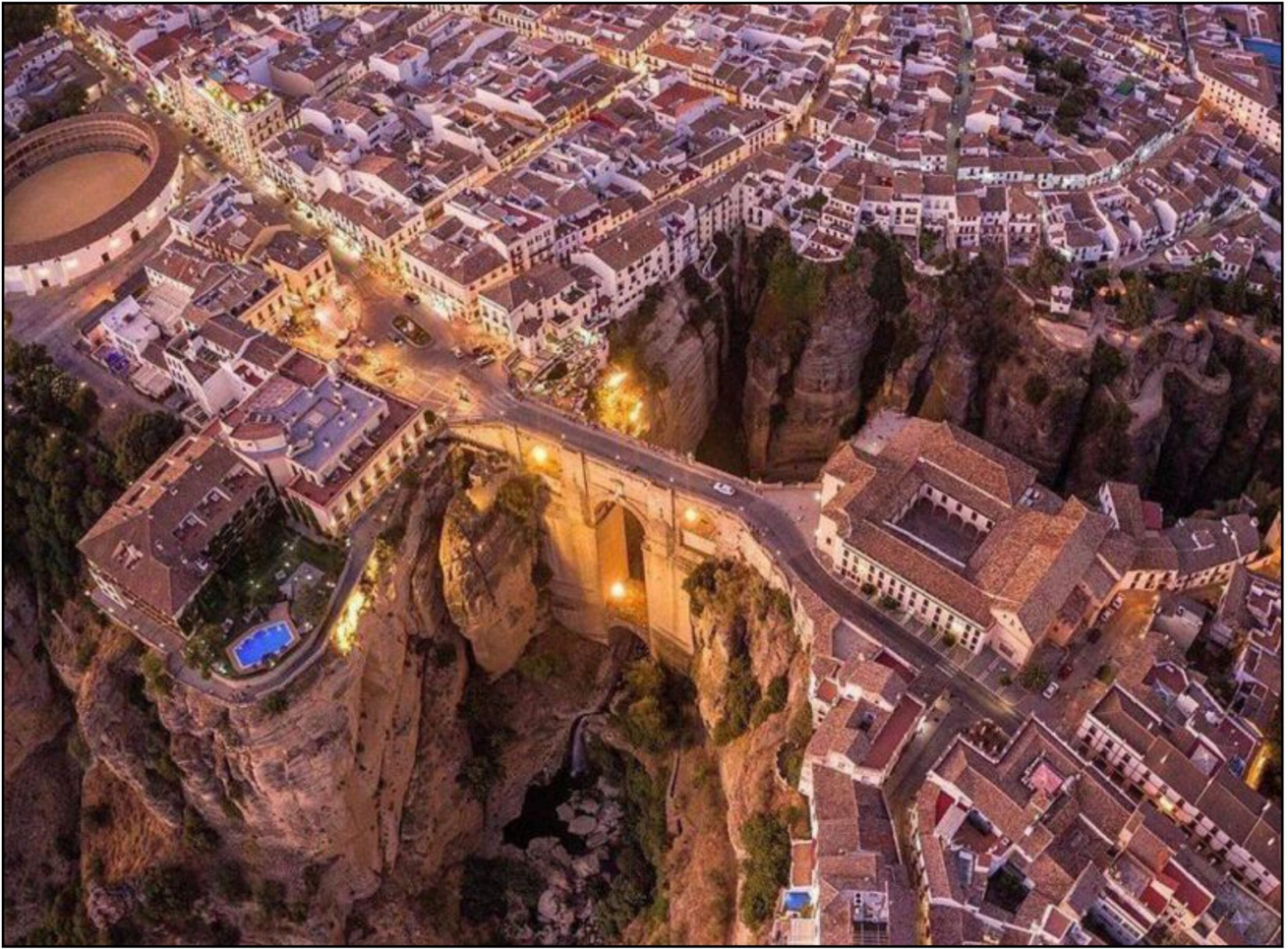
Langsamen Schrittes, nicht leicht, nachdenklichen
Körpers,
aber im Stehn ist er herrlich. Noch immer dürfte ein
Gott
heimlich in diese Gestalt und würde nicht minder.
Abwechselnd weilt er und zieht, wie selber der Tag,
und Schatten der Wolken
durchgehn ihn, als dächte der Raum
langsam Gedanken für ihn.

slow stepping, not light-footed, his body lost in

thought,
but splendid when he stands still. A God might
secretly take his form and not be any the lesser.
By turns he tarries and continues on like the day
itself
and the shadows of the clouds
pass through him, as if the vast space
were thinking slow thoughts for him.
(translation Paul Archer)

The poetry is beautiful. However, one cannot help but wonder about how shepherd felt looking up toward the hotel on the cliff. And whether this young shepherd would participate in the revolution some twenty years later.

As well as the canyon and its bridge, Ronda is famous for its *plaza de toros* (bullring) which was built in 1785. The bullring is seen in the upper left of the aerial view of Ronda in the following illustration:



Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) first visited Ronda in 1923 and became enamored of its site and of the bullfights (Buckley, 1997). In his 1932 book on the traditions of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, he remarked

There is one town that would be better than Aranjuez to see your first bullfight in if you are only going to see one and that is Ronda.

Hemingway visited Spain during the Civil War, although at that time he could not visit Ronda, which was controlled by the Nationalists. He returned to Ronda many times in the 1950s. For the bullfights, and for the memories.

The Spanish Civil War

In 1931, the Spanish king was deposed and a new government was proclaimed: the Second Spanish Republic, the first having lasted for less than two years (1873-1874) before being aborted by a military coup. The governing coalition of the Second Republic was composed of many separate and feuding parties, among them Anarchists, Communists, Republicans and Catalanian Separatists. The right-wing opposition contained parties favoring the Monarchy or the Catholic Church. The Falangist party, a fascist organization was founded in 1933 in response to the new republic.

The government had to deal with multiple problems

- much of the land was owned by the aristocrats, who managed large tracts of land (*latifundia*), and who treated the peasants as slaves
- the military was far larger and more powerful than necessary for a country that had long ago lost its empire
- the church sided with the generals and the aristocrats, for they were the source of their power and wealth
- the new industries, run by a small number of capitalists, exploited the workers who made the factories run, and who were organizing into unions
- the police force – the *Guardia Civil* – mainly existed to support the landed aristocrats and the capitalists.

The course of the Second Republic was extremely turbulent. The government reduced funds for the military, and closed down the military academy in Zaragoza, run by General Francisco Franco. Strikes occurred and these were put down with excessive force. Attempts to take land away from the *latifundista* were unsuccessful. The government tried to restrict the role of the church in the educational system. Many of the poor, urged on by anarchists and communists, attacked the church. In 1933, Pope Pius XI published an encyclical *Dilectissima Nobis* ("Dear to us") specifically deploring the anti-clerical violence in Spain.

In the election of January, 1936, the left-wing parties in the Popular Front won a majority against a coalition of the right-wing parties named the National Front. Many have suggested that the election was rigged to some extent, and the voting was followed by much violence. Manuel Azana Diaz (1880-1940), who had served in various positions in the preceding government, became the president of the newly elected Republican government.

In July 1936, General Emilio Mola, supported by General Francisco Franco, called for a coup to end the republic and to return the nation to its previous form. The leftist parties reacted by calling for a Revolution of the workers. The country descended into anarchy. The Nationalists (or Rebels) were able to take control the north of the country, but the Republicans (or Loyalists) held off the coup in the south and in the major cities. The Civil War had begun (Thomas, 1961; Graham, 2005; Payne, 2012).

The governments of Germany and Italy immediately provided assistance to the Nationalists, and Russia came in on the side of the Republicans. England and France decided that they should not intervene in the internal politics of Spain. However, volunteers from these and many other countries (even Germany and Italy) began to organize the International Brigades to fight with the Republicans: among them were the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the United States and the Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade from Canada.

Soon after the coup was declared, Franco borrowed planes from Italy and Germany and transported troops from North Africa to shore up the Nationalists in Seville, a Catholic stronghold. The regions of the country controlled by the Nationalists (blue) and the Republicans (white) in July, 1936) are shown in the following map (derived from Preston, 2012, p 658):



From Seville, General Franco sent troops northward to join up with the Nationalists besieging Madrid. Another key point in the fighting was near Teruel, where Nationalist soldiers were attempting to advance to the sea to cut off Barcelona from Madrid. Franco also sent troops eastward to relieve the city of Granada.

Mola died in a plane crash in June of 1937, and General Francisco Franco Bahamonde (1892-1975) became the supreme leader (*el caudillo*) of the Nationalist forces. The following illustration shows the leaders of the two sides. On the left is a modernist stone statue of Manuel Azena by José Noja and Pablo Serrano that was not erected until 1979. On the right is a bronze equestrian statue of Francisco Franco by José Capuz Mamano initially cast in 1964. Various versions of this statue were erected in several of the major cities of Spain.



The following figure shows propaganda posters from both sides of the civil war. On the left is a poster stating “*No Pasareis*” (You shall not pass). This slogan and its variant “*No Pasaran*” (They shall not pass) was used by the Republicans throughout the war. The Communist politician Dolores Ibarruri Gomez (also known as *La Pasionara* – the passionate one) used the latter version in a famous speech urging on the defenders of Madrid in November 1936. The Republican poster comes from the two parties that were the mainstay of the Popular Front: the CNT (*Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo*) and the FAI (*Federacion Anarquista Iberica*). The right poster is from the Falangists. In the background are the four red arrows held together by a yoke, the Spanish version of the *fascis* (bundle of rods) of the Italian Fascists. Superimposed is a hand on a rifle. The call is “To arms – Homeland, Bread and Justice.”



Events in Ronda during 1936ca)

Soon after the military coup was declared in July, 1936, members of the CNT took control in Ronda and many of the small towns in Andalusia. Members of the *Guardia Civil* and many local Nationalist leaders were executed. Similar outbreaks of violence occurred in many regions of Spain. This “red terror” was not condoned by the Republican Government, which had difficulty controlling its many factions.

Once the Nationalists had shored up control of Seville, Franco placed the bloodthirsty General Queipo de Llano in command of retaking Southern Spain. After Granada was relieved, the Nationalists returned to the other cities of Andalusia. Reaching Ronda in September, 1936 they quickly subdued the town, and took bloody revenge. Those killed by the Nationalists far outnumbered those who had been murdered in the summer (Preston, 2012).

Exactly what had happened in Ronda during these early months of the war was not clear. The Nationalists declared that the anarchists had murdered several hundred people and thrown them over the cliff. This claim was used to justify their reprisals.

Many of the townspeople left Ronda and fled to Malaga, but this city soon fell to the Nationalists in February 1937. Republicans in Malaga were rounded up and shot. The Nationalists boasted that they executed more Republicans in seven days than the Republicans had killed in the seven months they were in control of the city (Preston, 2012, p 177).

Most of the citizens of Malaga, together with a few surviving Republican soldiers, then tried to reach Almeria along the coastal road – walking, riding donkeys and hanging onto rickety vehicles for a distance of about 200 km. These refugees were strafed and bombed by planes, and shelled by Nationalists warships. The number of people killed in what became known as the Malaga-Almeria Massacre was over 3000. The Canadian physician Norman Bethune used the few vehicles available to him to help the refugees travel to Almeria (Stewart, R., & Majada Neila, 2014), but this had little effect. The following photograph shows the refugees:

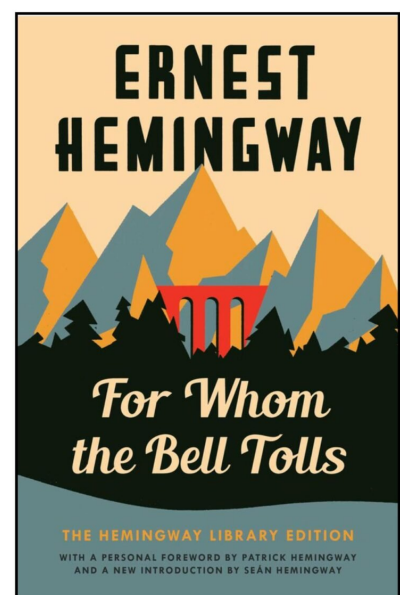
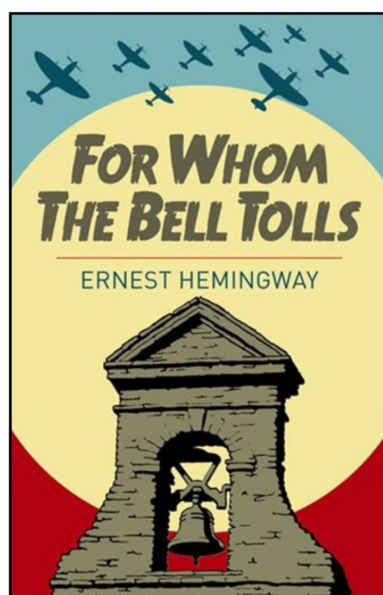
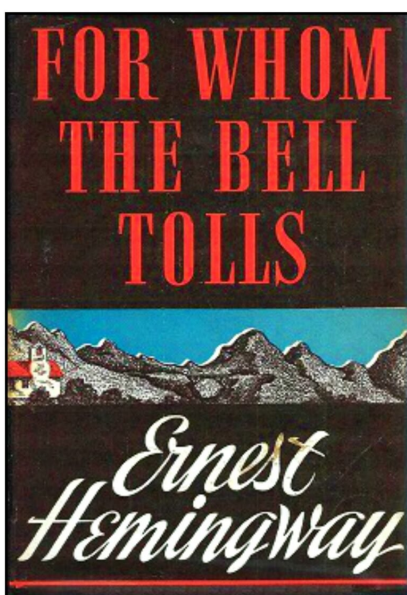


For Whom the Bell Tolls

Ernest Hemingway came to Spain toward the end of 1937 to produce a documentary film on the Civil War – *The Spanish Earth* – to help raise money for the Republicans. The photograph below shows him in the Republican trenches at Teruel (low center) together with the filmmaker Joris Ivens (high center).



After the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a novel based on what he had heard about the violence perpetrated by both sides during the conflict. The following illustration shows some of the covers used by various editions of the book, the original on the left:



The epigraph to the novel is from John Donne's *Meditations*

upon Emergent Occasions (1624) The quotation ends with:

any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.

The novel's central character is Robert Jordan, an American Professor of Spanish, and an explosives expert, now a volunteer serving with the Republicans. In the spring of 1937, he is ordered to blow up a mountain-bridge to prevent Nationalist forces from Segovia from reaching Madrid. For this task he recruits the help of a band of Republican guerillas, led by Pablo and his woman Pilar. Jordan falls in love with Maria, a beautiful young woman serving as the band's cook. Maria's father, the Republican mayor of Valladolid, and her mother had been executed by the Nationalists early in the war. She herself had her head shaved, and was raped and imprisoned, before finally escaping to the mountains.

One evening, Pilar tells Jordan and Maria what had happened in Ronda at the beginning of the war. Pablo, the leader of the local anarchists in the town, had captured the barracks of the *Guardia Civil* and executed all the guards. He had also rounded up the main supporters of the Nationalists and imprisoned them in the city council. Pilar describes the center of the town (see preceding illustrations):

The town is built on the high bank above the river and there is a square there with a fountain and there are benches and there are big trees that give a shade for the benches. The balconies of the houses look out on the plaza. Six streets enter on the plaza and there is an arcade from the houses that goes around the plaza so that one can walk in the shade of the arcade when the sun is hot. On three sides of the plaza is the arcade and on the fourth side is the walk shaded by the trees beside the edge of the cliff with, far below, the river. It is three hundred feet down to the

river.

Pilar then describes how the town square was set up for the execution of the fascists:

Pablo organized it all as he did the attack on the barracks. First he had the entrances to the streets blocked off with carts though to organize the plaza for a *capea*. For an amateur bull fight. The fascists were all held in the *Ayuntamiento*, the city hall, which was the largest building on one side of the plaza. It was there the clock was set in the wall and it was in the buildings under the arcade that the club of the fascists was.

Pablo organized the peasants and workers who had gathered in the square:

He placed them in two lines as you would place men for a rope pulling contest, or as they stand in a city to watch the ending of a bicycle road race with just room for the cyclists to pass between, or as men stood to allow the passage of a holy image in a procession. Two meters was left between the lines and they extended from the door of the *Ayuntamiento* clear across the plaza to the edge of the cliff. So that, from the doorway of the *Ayuntamiento*, looking across the plaza, one coming out would see two solid lines of people waiting.

They were armed with flails such as are used to beat out the grain and they were a good flail's length apart. All did not have flails, as enough flails could not be obtained. But most had flails obtained from the store of Don Guillermo Martin, who was a fascist and sold all sorts of agricultural implements. And those who did not have flails had heavy herdsman's clubs, or ox-goats, and some had wooden pitchforks; those with wooden tines that are used to fork the chaff and straw into the air after the flailing. Some had sickles and reaping hooks but these Pablo placed at the far end where the lines reached the edge of the cliff.

The assembled crowd was told that they must kill the fascists by beating them to death. One of the peasants asked Pilar why, and she reported the following exchange:

“To save bullets” I said. “And that each man should have his share in the responsibility”

“That it should start then. That it should start.” And I looked at him and saw that he was crying. “Why are you crying, Joaquin?” I asked him. “This is not to cry about.”

“I cannot help it, Pilar,” he said. “I have never killed any one.”

One by one, the fascists were led out of the city hall and made their way through the crowd of peasants. One by one, they were beaten and clubbed to death. And one by one, their bodies were cast over the edge of the cliff into *el tajo*.

This fictional representation of the Anarchist terror in Ronda is extremely powerful. In the novel Hemingway also describes Nationalist atrocities in Valladolid – the summary execution of Maria’s parents and her abuse and rape by the Falangists. This vivid portrayal of the brutality of the war should make us rethink our hatreds. We are all in this life together; we are diminished by the death of any man; the bell tolls for us.

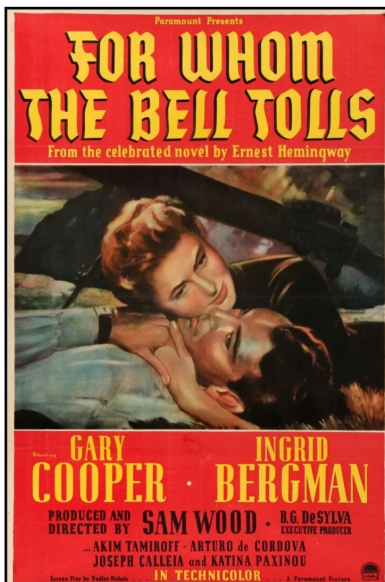
Later in the novel, Jordan and the guerilla band succeed in blowing up the bridge. but Jordan is severely wounded and unable to move. He convinces that the rest of the band to retreat while he stays to delay the advancing Nationalists. He insists that Maria leave with the guerillas. The novel ends with Jordan trying to stay conscious as the soldiers come closer. Talking to himself, he claims

And if you wait and hold them up even a little while or just get the officer that may make all the difference. One thing well done can make □

Hemingway leaves the thought unfinished. The novel ends with

an officer of the Nationalist forces riding slowly up toward where Jordan awaits him.

The book sold well, and in 1943 it was made into a film starring Gary Cooper as Jordan, Ingrid Bergman as Maria, Akim Tamiroff as Pablo and Katina Paxinou as Pilar. The film was an international success, although it was not distributed in France or Germany until after World War II (see posters below). The film received multiple nominations for the Academy Awards, with Katina Paxinou winning for best supporting actress.



The film follows the novel quite closely. When Pilar recounts her tale of what happened in Ronda at the beginning of the Civil War, the movie shows in flashback some of the brutal executions in the plaza:



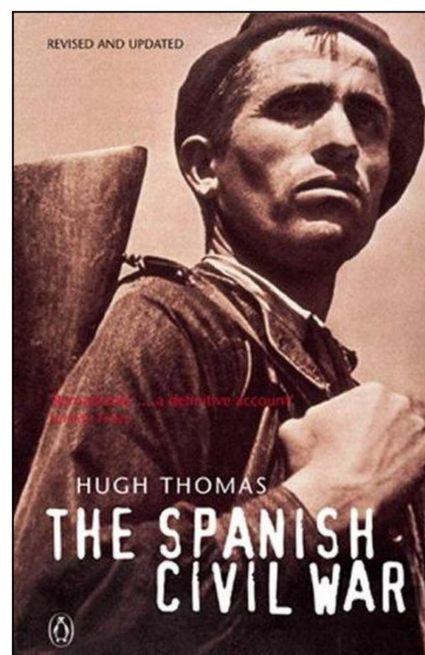
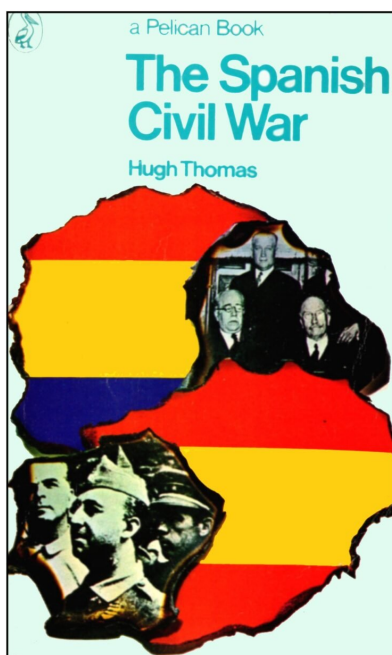
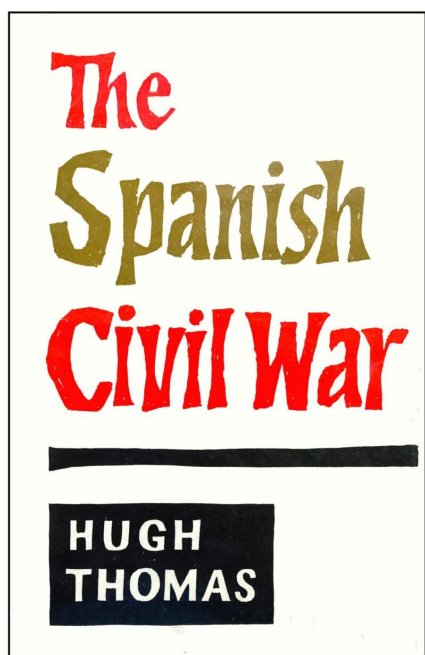
The bridge that Jordan dynamites just before the end of the movie is as high as the Puente Nuevo in Ronda:



Historical Accounts of the Events in Ronda

The history of *The Spanish Civil War* (1961) by Hugh Thomas was the first major examination of what happened in Spain during

the war. The book became a best seller soon after it was published and it has since gone through two revisions and multiple printings:



Thomas discussed the events in Ronda:

In country districts. revolution itself often consisted primarily of the murder of the upper classes or the bourgeoisie. Thus the description, in Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, of how the inhabitants of a small pueblo first beat the male members of the middle class and then flung them over a cliff, is near to the reality of what happened in the famous Andalusian town of Ronda (though the work was the responsibility of a gang from Malaga). There, 512 were murdered in the first month of war. (p 263 in 1989 printing)

Other historians have proposed that the Ronda executions described by Hemingway, although based on accounts he had heard, was completely fictional. Buckley (1997) described what happened in Ronda in the Summer of 1936, according to the records maintained in the town hall:

On 19 July 1936 the commander of the small army garrison in

Ronda, upon reports of a military uprising in Morocco, went to the Town Hall with a small platoon and demanded that the mayor submit to his authority and publicly announce that the city was under martial law and the army was taking control. The mayor belonged to the left-wing coalition known as the Popular Front. He refused to follow the commander's orders and swiftly disarmed him and his small band of soldiers, heavily outnumbered by the peasant groups beginning to assemble on the plaza outside the town hall. Thus, Ronda remained loyal to the Republican government of Madrid, and did not fall to the fascists until 18 September 1936.

However, it would be wrong to assume that during these two months the Republican government in Madrid had any control over the town or its inhabitants. As soon as the reports of a military rising in Africa began to spread, the peasants from neighboring villages poured into Ronda and in effect took control. Although the mayor was nominally in charge, the real power belonged to a "Comite" formed by the peasants themselves, most of whom belonged to CNT (Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo), the Anarchist Labor Union.

The task of this committee was three-fold: first, to arrest all persons suspected of having fascist sympathies; second, to insure that food was evenly distributed to all inhabitants (money was outlawed and vouchers with the CNT rubber-stamp were issued); third, to prepare to defend Ronda from a probable attack by fascist troops stationed in Seville.

The word "revolution" immediately comes to mind when we attempt to describe the situation in Ronda in summer 1936. The Secretary's "Record of Proceedings" for 28 July 1936, preserved in Ronda's Town Hall, displays revolutionary rhetoric: "[W]e are living through a moment of historic transcendence ... the fascist coup has spurred the populace to rise to the last man and to demand social justice . . . a new society is being born, based upon liberty, justice and equality ... justice has now become `revolutionary justice'

designed to cleanse the state of all fascist elements as well as to establish the basis for a new social order etc."

Many priests and supporters of the Nationalist cause were executed. However, these victims were not killed in the plaza, but were driven away from the center of the town and shot. It is difficult to determine the number of those killed, but it was likely much less than the 512 claimed by the Nationalists. None of the bodies were thrown into *el tajo*. This story seems to have been invented by General Queipo to inflame his troops as they went about their reprisals.

Corbin (1995) considers the story about the executions in the plaza and the casting of the bodies into *el tajo* as an example of myth-making. Myths have their basis in historical events but the stories become altered in the telling, often to justify the actions of those in power:

Any story of the past has a double construction and a double truth. The truth of the tale told is its historical truth; the truth of its telling is its mythical truth.

The story of the executions by *el tajo* served the purpose of the Nationalists: it portrayed the class hatred of the anarchists and communists and the violence that they promulgated in the early weeks of the Civil War. This then justified their violent repression. Society must be protected from any recurrence of such revolutionary terror.

In *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012) which describes the repression of the Spanish Republicans during and after the Civil War, Paul Preston summarizes the events in Ronda:

Famous for its Roman and Arab bridges and its exquisite eighteenth-century bullring, Ronda had suffered a pitiless repression at the hands of anarchists led by a character known as 'El Gitano.' Initially, the CNT committee had maintained a degree of order although churches were sacked and images destroyed, but soon there were murders being

carried out by anarchists from Malaga and also by locals. However, there is no substance to the claim, first made by Queipo in a broadcast on 18 August and popularized by Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, that large numbers of prisoners were killed by being thrown into the *tajo*. The many rightist victims were shot in the cemetery. Francoist sources claim that victims of the red terror from Ronda and the nearby pueblos of Gaucin and Arriate numbered over six hundred. On 16 September, when Varela took the town, the defenders fled and his forces suffered only three casualties in the assault. His men stopped and interrogated anyone found in streets and shot many of them. Over half of the population fled towards Malaga. Under the new authorities, those of the town's defenders who had not fled were subjected to a bloody repression and the theft of their property. (p 171)

In the White City

The American poet, Philip Levine, spent time in Spain trying to learn more about the Spanish Civil War and the poets that wrote about it (Levine, 2016). He also wrote about Ronda in a prose-poem entitled *In the White City* (2009).

From up there-& he points to the bridge high above us-they tossed down the fat barber, the Falangist, to his death. "It is all in the book by the American communist." "The communist?" I say. Yes, the friend of Fidel Castro, Comrade Hemingway "The tourists come because of your Mr. Hemingway, that is why you are here." Who can argue with this young, balding lieutenant of the Guardia Civil who has dared to leave his barracks lacking his tricorne & with only a small sidearm? In felt house slippers he stands at ease on the west streets of his town, Ronda, to show me the world. "On those rocks," he continues, pointing to a ledge half way down the

gorge, "he first hits & his belly explodes. Then they rape his beautiful daughter, the film star that is Swedish, & when they have finish they shave her head. That is why we execute them all." Does he mean that is why in the novel the Nationalists executed them. (I am careful not to say "the fascists"; it is 1965.) "No, no, executed them here, in life or death"—he smiles at his little joke—"up there on the bridge"— & he points again,— "by military firing squad one at a time, properly. That is why the whole town must witness & learn. It is educational." But, I insist, the death of the Falangist was merely in a novel that made no effort to be true to events, *una novela*, a fiction, a best seller. The lieutenant enjoys this repartee, he's amused by my innocence, he shakes his head, he is discreet & patient with this visitor to his ancient city that boasts the first Plaza de Toros in all the world. "You Americans," and he suppresses his laughter, "you think because he was a famous red he could not tell the truth. They do not give Noble Prizes to liars."

The poem illustrates how history becomes mixed up with fiction, with movies, and with photographs to form the myths that we remember about the past. Hemingway was not a communist and, though he spent time in Cuba, he was not a friend of Castro (Michaud, 2012). This idea stems from photographs of the two of them together at a fishing competition, the only time they ever met. The character Maria in Hemingway's novel, played by the Swedish film-star in the movie, was the daughter of a mayor who was executed in the Civil War, but this was in a different town, and the mayor there was a Republican executed by the Nationalists. The poem ends with the idea that fiction written by a winner of the Noble (sic) Prize has to be true.

The following is an etching of the *Puente Nuevo* in Ronda done by Gary Young for a broadside edition of Levine's poem.



Epilogue

By the spring of 1938, the Nationalists ultimately made their way to the sea, isolating Barcelona from Madrid. After Franco's troops marched into Barcelona in January 1939, Manuel Azana was among the thousands of refugees who fled from Barcelona to France. In March, Madrid was taken and Franco declared victory on April 1, 1939, and became the Prime Minister of Spain, continuing in this office until 1973. During and after the war, many thousands of Republicans were executed by the Nationalists in a repression known as the "white terror" or the "Spanish Holocaust" (Preston, 2012).

Hemingway's novel was translated into Spanish as *Por quién doblan las campanas*, but was not allowed into Spain until 1969. The movie was not shown there until 1978. Hugh Thomas's history of the war was forbidden in Spain until after the death of Franco in 1975. Today Spain continues to unearth the bodies of those executed during and after the war, and to seek some understanding of the violence and brutality of those days (Anderson, 2017). The myths need to be converted back into history.

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Robinson Jeffers

Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) was an American poet who celebrated the beauty of California's coast. In 1914 he and his wife Una settled in Carmel. In 1919 Jeffers and his family moved into Tor House, a home that he and a stone-mason had built on Carmel Point using rocks from the shore. From 1920 to 1924 he built by himself the adjacent Hawk Tower. Jeffers became famous soon after the publication of *Tamar and Other Poems* in 1924. This book and those that followed included both long narratives and shorter lyrics. His epics were bloody and tragic; his verse was free and passionate. Underlying his poems was an austere philosophy of "inhumanism." This compared the transience of humanity to the persistence of the natural world, and proposed that we should detach ourselves from the passions of mankind and simply celebrate the beauty of the universe. Over the next decade, Jeffers published extensively and in 1932 his photograph graced the cover of *Time*. After World War II, his outrage at the death and destruction that occurred during the war and the severity of his inhumanist philosophy led to controversy and obscurity. In more recent years, the environmental movement has found inspiration in his

love of the natural world and his anger about how humanity has despoiled it.

Early Life

John Robinson Jeffers was born in 1887 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. His father was a Presbyterian minister and a Professor of Ancient Languages at the Western Theological Seminary. It was his father's second marriage, and his son's middle name, which he preferred, was in honor of the first wife, who had died five years earlier. Robinson Jeffers attended private schools in Pittsburgh, and then in Germany and Switzerland. He was a bright student and by the time he was 16 he was fluent in Latin, Greek, French and German. In 1903, his father turned 65 years old and retired to live in Los Angeles.

After graduating from Occidental College in 1905, Jeffers was unsure of what he wanted to do.. He studied languages at the University of Southern California for a year, but then switched to Medicine. After 3 years, he decided that he did not wish to be a physician and began studies in Forestry at the University of Seattle. He found the curriculum too business-oriented and quit, returning to Los Angeles in 1910.

While at the University of Southern California in 1906, Jeffers met Una Call Kuster (1884-1950) who was also studying languages (Greenan, 1988). At the age of 18 years, she had married Edward Kuster, a rich lawyer and socialite, but wished to complete her education before having a family. Over the years Robinson and Una become fast friends and then passionate lovers. By 1910, their affair became widely known, and divorce proceedings were initiated. These events may have contributed to Jeffers's moving to Seattle to study forestry. The following illustration shows photographs from 1911 (adapted from Karman, 1913).



After the divorce was finalized in 1913, Robinson and Una were married. Their first two years together were marked by grief. A daughter was born in early 1914 but only lived a day. The couple then moved to Carmel, a small village just south of the Monterey peninsula, to be alone together. Then Robinson's father died in December, 1914.

In 1912, Jeffers had published at his own expense a book of poems – *Flagons and Apples*. Of the 500 copies printed, 480 were remaindered and sold to a second-hand bookstore. Now in Carmel, inspired by the Big Sur country just south of the village, Jeffers put together a new book of poems – *The Californians* – that was published by Macmillan in 1916. This book contained poems of many forms and lengths, most using classical rhythms and rhyme-schemes.

Twin boys – Garth and Donnan – were born in 1916, and the Jeffers slowly settled into their life at Carmel. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Jeffers attempted to

join the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps but his application was rejected because he was already 30 years old and responsible for a new family. Jeffers attempted to write a long poem about the war but it came to nothing. In 1920 he submitted some new poems to Macmillan, but *The Californians* had not sold well and the publisher rejected his submission (Zaller, 1991).

Tor House and Hawk Tower

In 1919 Jeffers purchased land out on Carmel Point, a raised area jutting out into the ocean just south of Carmel Beach. Here Jeffers helped a stonemason to build Tor House using the rocks and boulders on the point and the adjacent beach. The name comes from the Gaelic word for hill or rocky outcrop. After the house was finished, Jeffers built the adjacent Hawk Tower by himself over several years. The following photographs by Morley Baer show views of the house and tower (from the land and from the sea) as it was in 1964 (Jeffers, Baer & Karman, 2001) At that time everything was still open to the sea; now other houses encroach upon the site.



Working on the house and the tower freed up Jeffers's mind and released his creative impulses. Jeffers stopped using rhyme,

and decided to write with natural rhythms in the style of Walt Whitman. Line length became a structuring device for his new poems, which often used alternating long and short lines (Hymes, 1991). The long lines have a grandeur but make the poems difficult to print upon either page or screen. In the books he was to publish in this style, the longer lines are broken in two. For this posting some of the poems will be printed in a smaller font than the rest of the text. These new characteristics are present in his poem about *Tor House* (published in 1928):

If you should look for this place after a handful of lifetimes:

Perhaps of my planted forest a few

May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast cypress,
haggard

With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils.

Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers had the art

To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant.

But if you should look in your idleness after ten thousand years:

It is the granite knoll on the granite

And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth of the Carmel

River-valley, these four will remain

In the change of names. You will know it by the wild sea-fragrance of wind

Though the ocean may have climbed or retired a little;

You will know it by the valley inland that our sun and our moon were born from

Before the poles changed; and Orion in December

Evenings was strung in the throat of the valley like a lamp-lighted bridge.

Come in the morning you will see white gulls

Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon

Their dance-companion, a ghost walking

By daylight, but wider and whiter than any bird in the world.

My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably

Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind

With the mad wings and the day moon. (CP I, 408)

(The references for this and for subsequent poems in this posting are to Jeffers's *Collected Poems* edited by Tim Hunt).

Tamar

Jeffers's first collection of poems after moving to Tor House – *Tamar and Other Poems* (1924), published at his own expense – was written in his new free verse. The epic poem *Tamar* tells the tragedy of a family living at Point Lobos just south of Carmel. The tale has biblical echoes in the stories of Tamar who seduced her father-in-law Judah (*Genesis* 38), and of her namesake Tamar, the daughter of King David, who was raped by her step-brother Amnon (2 *Samuel* 13). The following is a summary of Jeffers's poem (from Karman, 2015, pp 55-56);

Tamar ... tells the story of the doomed Cauldwells who live in an isolated home on Point Lobos, south of Carmel. The head of the house is David Cauldwell, an old, broken-down man who frequently quotes the Bible. Two children, a son named Lee and a daughter Tamar, live with him, along with his demented sister Jinny, and Stella Moreland, the sister of his dead wife Lily. The action of the story, set around the time of America's entry into World War I, concerns Tamar's incestuous relationship with her brother, an ensuing pregnancy, and her seduction of an unloved suitor to snare a respectable father for the child. Through her Aunt Stella, a medium for the dead, Tamar learns that her father had an incestuous relationship with his sister Helen, which makes her behavior seem more like the simple repetition of a family pattern instead of the singular act of a bounds-breaking free spirit. In the process of coming to terms with

this knowledge, Tamar dances naked in a trance-induced frenzy on the seashore, where she is violated by the ghosts of Indians who once lived on Point Lobos, and where she speaks with the ghost of her Aunt Helen, her father's sister-lover. As Tamar's mind sickens, she thinks of ways to destroy her family, especially after learning that her brother, seeking adventure, plans to enlist and leave home. The end comes in a wild conflagration. On the eve of her brother's departure, with her benighted suitor at hand, Tamar orchestrates an explosion of jealous rage. As her brother pulls a knife and stabs her suitor, Tamar's Aunt Jinny sets the house on fire. Floors break, walls fall, and everyone perishes in the flames.

Jeffers tells his convoluted story of incest and murder in an epic style, and intersperses the events with quieter descriptions of the California Coast. This combination of the lurid and the lyrical makes for uneasy reading. Not a poem for the faint of heart, it was the first of many long narratives that Jeffers was to write over the next decades.

The book also contains many short poems describing the beauty of the California Coast, such as *Divinely Superfluous Beauty*:

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,
Over and under the ocean...
Divinely superfluous beauty
Rules the games, presides over destinies, makes trees grow
And hills tower, waves fall.
The incredible beauty of joy
Stars with fire the joining of lips, O let our loves too
Be joined, there is not a maiden
Burns and thirsts for love
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals while the
wings
Weave like a web in the air
Divinely superfluous beauty.(CP I, 4)

Jeffers also began to consider the transience of humanity in a universe that lasts for ever in such poems as *To the Stone-Cutters* (recorded by Jeffers in 1941):

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall
down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave
sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained
thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems. (CP I, 5)

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/To-The-Stone-Cutters-by-Robinson-Jeffers.mp3>

Big Sur

The California coast south of Carmel and north of San Simeon is known as the Big Sur – a name deriving from the Spanish *el sur grande* (the big south), which is how the Spanish settlers on the Monterey Peninsula referred to the region. Here the Santa Lucia mountains rise directly from the sea. Edward Weston (1886-1958) took many striking photographs of this coastline, and in 1938 moved his studio to Carmel. Below are Weston's photographs from 1929 and 1938.



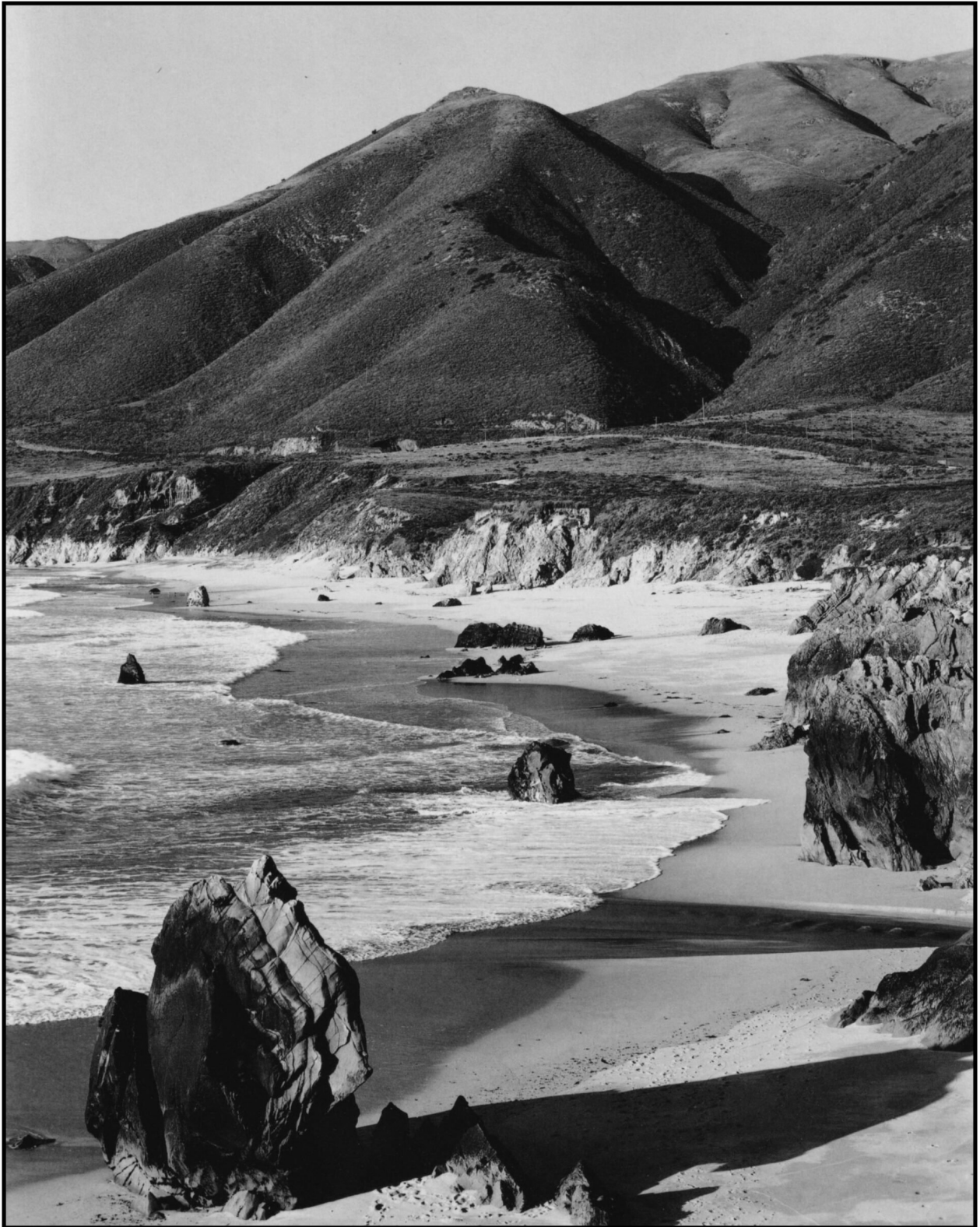
The poetry of Robinson Jeffers celebrated the beauty of Big Sur. The following is a poem about Garapata Beach where Soberanes (or Sovranes) Creek empties into the Pacific – *The Place for No Story* (1932). When introducing the poem in a reading in 1941 Jeffers remarked about the title:

These eleven lines are called “The Place for No Story,” because the coast here, its pure and simple grandeur, seemed to me too beautiful to be the scene of any narrative of mine. (Jeffers, 1956)

The coast hills at Sovranes Creek;
No trees, but dark scant pasture drawn thin
Over rock shaped like flame;
The old ocean at the land’s foot, the vast
Gray extension beyond the long white violence;
A herd of cows and the bull
Far distant, hardly apparent up the dark slope;
And the gray air haunted with hawks:
This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen. No
imaginable
Human presence here could do anything
But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion. (CP II, 157)

The following it is a 1964 photograph of the beach by Morley Baer (Jeffers, Baer & Karman, 2001). Barely visible in the

photograph are hawks, haunting the sky above the further slopes:



The poem is “an evocation of the sublime” (Zaller, 2012, p 171). Yet it differs from Wordsworth’s sublime. It is not the

participation of the individual human consciousness in something universal:

...a sense sublime,
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

(Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, 1798)

For Jeffers, the sublime is totally independent of any human interaction. It is something to be wondered at but not participated in.

Fame

After *Tamar*, Jeffers became very successful, publishing a book every year or two. Like *Tamar*, these books contained both long narratives and short lyrics. His poetic style – the long lines and the free rhythms – did not change. The narrative poems continued to be full of sex and violence – like penny-dreadfuls updated to the 20th Century and translated into poetry. Jeffers, however, had tapped some current in the American soul.

The shorter poems continued to be more approachable. The following is *Hawk and Rock* (1935). Robert Hass (1987) was to use this as the title poem for a later collection of Jeffers's shorter lyrics.

Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts
Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall
On the headland, where the sea-wind

Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signatured
By ages of storms: on its peak
A falcon has perched.

I think, here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness;

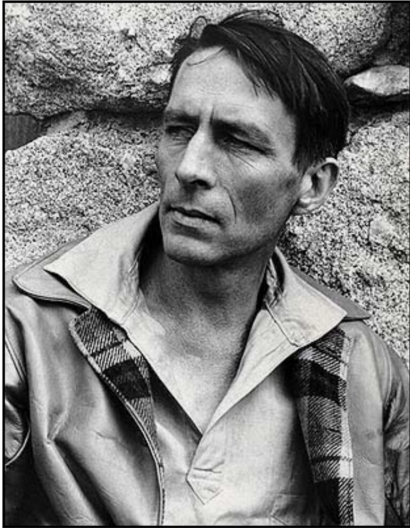
Life with calm death; the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud. (CP II, 416)

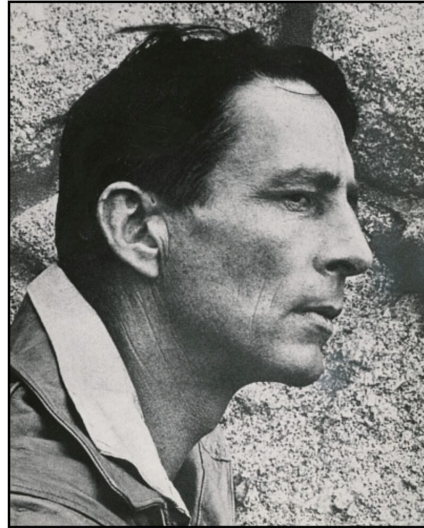
The poem proclaims Jeffers outlook on life – a combination of fierce consciousness and disinterestedness, bright power and dark peace. The following shows the final lines in Jeffers's handwriting (from an inscription in a book gifted to a friend).

— The massive
Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down,
Nor success make proud.

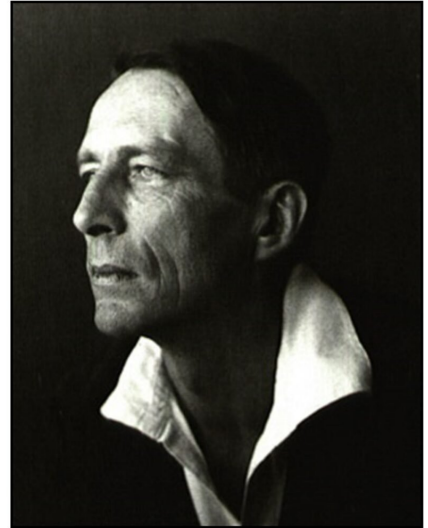
Jeffers's photograph made the cover of *Time* in 1932. (It was not until 1950 that the magazine awarded a cover portrait to either Robert Frost or T. S. Eliot.) In 1938, Random House published *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, a volume of over 600 pages. The following are photographs of Jeffers taken by Edward Weston during the height of his fame – the middle image is from the cover of *Time*:



1929



1932



1933

Inhumanism

Jeffers had received a modern scientific education and understood the import of evolutionary theory and recent findings in astronomy upon our place in the world and in time. He realized that the human species might develop further, but would ultimately become extinct, the universe then continuing to exist without any further contribution from mankind. Nevertheless, he gloried in the heart-breaking beauty of the natural world. He described this “religious feeling” in his 1941 talk to the Library of Congress (Jeffers, 1956, pp 23-24):

It is the feeling ... I will say the certitude ... that the world, the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be love and revered; and in

moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it.

But these moments are evanescent. The beauty of the world will outlast us. The following are the lines that end his 1926 poem *Credo*:

The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient to itself; the heart-breaking beauty
Will remain when there is no heart to break for it. (CP I, 239)

Jeffers view of beauty was that it was part of nature and would outlast the perceiver. An opposing view is that beauty is in the mind, and that human beings have evolved to find the world they live in beautiful. Such a development facilitates human survival: if we cherish the world, we will reap its bounty.

Jeffers's philosophy was more specifically described in the preface to his 1947 book *The Double Axe* (the original version of which is included in his 2001 *Selected Poetry* edited by Tim Hunt):

It is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. We know this, of course, but it does not appear that any previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it. An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard. The attitude is neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious, though two or three people have said so, and may again; but it involves a certain detachment.

Jeffers contrasted his ideas to Renaissance Humanism, which, though he preferred it to the preceding Scholastic Theology, he felt improperly placed Man at the center of the universe. The Renaissance took to heart wisdom of philosophers such as

Protagoras of Abdera who proposed that "Man is the measure of all things" and doubted the existence of the gods: "Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not, nor of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life." (Bonazzi, 2020). Renaissance philosophers like Pico della Mirandola focussed on the man rather than on God. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, he proclaimed that "There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than Man" (Forbes, 1942).

Jeffers called his philosophy "inhumanism" to distinguish it from the humanism of the Renaissance (Carpenter, 1981). As Nafis-Sahely (2016) has remarked, the philosophy "might have fared better under a different name." Perhaps, for example, "naturalism." The first meaning suggested by the word "inhumanism" is "brutality." Jeffers's inhumanism is an austere and detached view of the world. It has many similarities to stoicism (Lioi, 2025): we live our life as best we can; we pass away and the world persists. In his 1941 talk, Jeffers (1956, p 28) related his inhumanism to the main tenets of Christianity:

It seems to me, analogously, that the whole human race spends too much emotion on itself. The happiest and freest man is the scientist investigating nature, or the artist admiring it; the person who is interested in things that are not human. Or if he is interested in human things, let him regard them objectively, as a small part of the great music. Certainly humanity has claims, on all of us; we can best fulfill them by keeping our emotional sanity; and this by seeing beyond and around the human race. This is far from humanism; but it is, in fact, the Christian attitude: ... to love God with all one's heart and soul, and one's neighbor as one's self – as much as that, but as little as that.

Jeffers was enthusiastic in his love of nature, but far more detached in his love of neighbor. Although he wrote in the style of Walt Whitman, he lacked that poet's intense love of

his fellow man.

One of the clearest poetic descriptions of inhumanism is in final section of the late poem *De Rerum Virtute* or (On the Nature of Virtue) (1954, discussed extensively by Chapman, 2002):

One light is left us: the beauty of things, not men;
The immense beauty of the world, not the human world.
Look—and without imagination, desire nor dream—directly
At the mountains and sea. Are they not beautiful?
These plunging promontories and flame-shaped peaks
Stopping the sombre stupendous glory, the storm-fed ocean?
Look at the Lobos Rocks off the shore,
With foam flying at their flanks, and the long sea-lions
Couching on them. Look at the gulls on the cliff-wind,
And the soaring hawk under the cloud-stream—
But in the sage-brush desert, all one sun-stricken
Color of dust, or in the reeking tropical rain-forest,
Or in the intolerant north and high thrones of ice—is the
earth not beautiful?
Nor the great skies over the earth?
The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.
It is in the beholder's eye, not the world? Certainly.
It is the human mind's translation of the transhuman
Intrinsic glory. It means that the world is sound,
Whatever the sick microbe does. But he too is part of it.
(CP III, 403)

The Double Axe

Jeffers was thoroughly dismayed by World War II and believed that the United States should never have entered the fighting. His pacifism was accentuated by the fact that his son Garth was serving in the US forces. Donnan had been excused because of a heart murmur. Jeffers could not see any difference between the sides – he thought that Churchill and Roosevelt were as guilty as Hitler and Mussolini.

In 1948 Jeffers published his first collection of poems since Pearl Harbor – *The Double Axe*. The title poem was composed of two parts: *The Love and the Hate* and *The Inhumanist*. In the first part a young soldier killed in the Pacific Campaign wills his decaying body to return home to the family ranch in the Big Sur and confront his father:

Did you
And your old buddies decide what the war's about?
I came to ask. You were all for it, you know;
And keeping safe away from it, so to speak, maybe you see
Reasons that we who only die in it can't, (CP III, 222)

The second part of the poem occurs years later on the same Big Sur ranch. Its caretaker (and possessor of the double-bit axe) looks after the homestead as various refugees from a nuclear war arrive. After a snowfall the old man addresses his axe to repudiate the humanism of the Renaissance:

Man is no measure of anything. Truly it is yours to hack, snow's to be white, mine to admire;
Each cat mind her own kitten: that is our morals. But wait till the moon comes up the snow-tops,
And you'll sing Holy. (CP III, 264)

Jeffers's politics and philosophy did not appeal to a people that considered the war they had just won as righteous. The publisher convinced Jeffers to withdraw some of his most virulent anti-war poems (Shebl, 1976) and added a disclaimer to the book in a "Publisher's Note":

Random House feels compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume.

The reviews were scathing. From then on, Jeffers was no longer an acclaimed poet. He lived out the rest of his life in Carmel in relative obscurity. He continued to publish occasionally but critics disparaged his work even while admitting its importance. The following is from a review of his posthumously published last poems:

Surely he provides us with plenty to carp about: his oracular moralizing, his cruel and thoroughly repellent sexuality, his dreadful lapses of taste when he seems simply to throw back his head and howl, his slovenly diction, the eternal sameness of his themes, the amorphous sprawl of his poems on the page. The sheer power and drama of some of Jeffers' writing, however, still carries the day despite everything, and this is not so much because of the presence of the Truth that Jeffers believes he has got hold of but because of what might be called the embodiment of that Truth: Jeffers' gorgeous panorama of big imagery, his galaxies, suns, seas, cliffs, continents, mountains, rivers, flocks of birds, gigantic schools of fish, and so on. His Truth is hard to swallow try looking at your children and drawing comfort from Jeffers' "inhumanism"—but one cannot shake off Jeffers' vision as one can the carefully prepared surprises of many of the neatly packaged stanzas we call "good poems"; it is too deeply disturbing and too powerfully stated. (Dickey, 1964).

In the late 60s the escalation of the Vietnam War led to the involvement and death of US troops. Jeffers's passionate pacificism became more understandable, and his poetry underwent some rehabilitation and republication (Nolte, 1978).

The Environmental Movement

Another important development affecting the reputation of Robinson Jeffers was the birth of the modern environmental movement with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. As well as pointing out the severe problems that result from our misuse of the environment, the movement also published books showing the beauty of unspoiled nature. A major example of this was the book *Not Man Apart* (Adams et al, 1964) which combined photographs of the Big Sur Coast with lines from Robinson Jeffers.

Karman (2015) remarks about Jeffers attitude to man's place in

nature:

Jeffers' experience of deep time added a vatic amplitude to his verse, and a sharp moral edge. He spoke repeatedly about the destruction of Earth's environment, warning, shrilly at times, of the effects of overpopulation, pollution, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Quigley (2002) places Jeffers in a direct line between Thoreau (1817-1862) and later authors such as Edward Abbey (1927-1989) and Gary Snyder (1930-) in the development of modern environmentalism. Of these writers, Jeffers was the most critical of how man has misused the world, and perhaps the most pessimistic. However, Abbey, Snyder and other writers have taken to heart his criticisms and tried to formulate new and better ways for man and nature to interact. Wyatt (1986) has written of the affinity between Jeffers and Snyder, both of whom spent much time building homes to fit in with the natural world. John Elder (1985) discussed Jeffers and nature in the context of how nature and humanity must interact – a process that he terms “culture:”

In learning to find equivalence between mountains, grass, and man, we gain the composure of a larger design. It is not a fixed, symmetrical rose, like Dante's covering order, but rather a process of tidal exchange, of decay and renewal. Only as we learn to see it in a natural order beyond man's civilized system may the human waste-land be redeemed and the individual made whole. Conversely, unless the city is restored and human life brought back into physical and spiritual balance, the wilderness beloved of fierce solitaires like Jeffers will inevitably be destroyed. The circuit of mutual dependence between nature and civilization defines my understanding of the word culture: it is a process rather than a product, something that grows rather than being manufactured. And only in poetry is culture fully realized.</p>

In Retrospect

Jeffers wrote some powerful but difficult longer poems and some fine shorter lyrics. I would like to end the posting with one of his early poems – *The Excesses of God* (1924) – together with the engraving by Malette Dean that accompanies the poem in his 1956 book:

Is it not by his high superfluousness we know
Our God? For to equal a need
Is natural, animal, mineral: but to fling
Rainbows over the rain
And beauty above the moon, and secret rainbows
On the domes of deep sea-shells,
And make the necessary embrace of breeding
Beautiful also as fire,
Not even the weeds to multiply without blossom
Nor the birds without music:
There is the great humaneness at the heart of things,
The extravagant kindness, the fountain
Humanity can understand, and would flow likewise
If power and desire were perch-mates. (CP I, 4)



Resources

The website of the Robinson Jeffers Association provides links to many different resources about the poet, including an archive of most of the issues of the journal *Jeffers Studies*.

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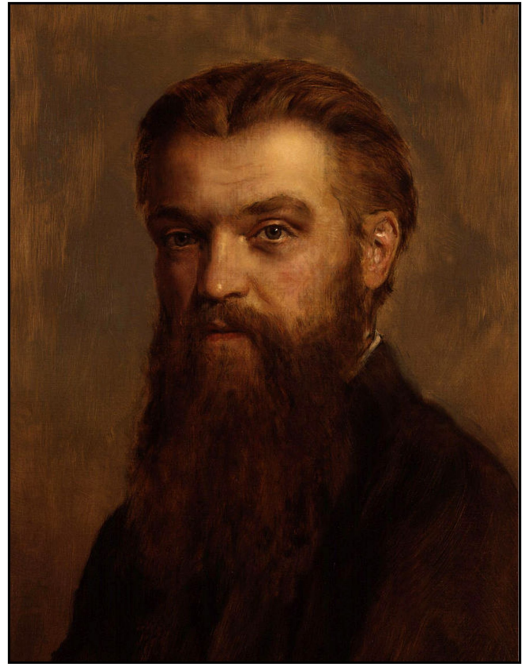
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The Ethics of Belief

In the 19th-Century religious belief came under scientific scrutiny. In 1877, William Kingdon Clifford, an English mathematician and philosopher, proposed that

it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

Without good supporting evidence, one should refrain from believing: it is wrong to take anything on faith. This proposal was disputed by the American philosopher and psychologist William James in an 1896 lecture entitled *The Will to Believe*. James argued that under certain conditions we must form beliefs and act on them, even though the evidence is insufficient. The main requirements were that the believer must choose between two “genuine” possibilities, and that the choice must be sufficiently “momentous” that not choosing would entail significant risk. The latter condition harkens back to the “wager” of Blaise Pascal, wherein a person decides what to believe based on the consequences of these beliefs rather than the evidence for them.



William Kingdon Clifford (1845-79)

William Clifford, a professor of mathematics and mechanics at the University of London, made significant contributions to algebra and to geometry, his ideas in the latter foreshadowing Einstein's *Theory of General Relativity*. He was also interested in the philosophical implications of science, publishing essays on *The Scientific Basis of Morals* and *The Ethics of Belief*.

Clifford begins the latter essay with a story about a shipwreck:

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely

through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Clifford insisted that the ship-owner was responsible for the deaths of all who drowned. He may have sincerely believed in the soundness of his ship, but he had no right to so believe on the basis of the evidence before him. Clifford insisted further that had the ship not foundered, its owner was still guilty. From such examples he proposed the principle ("later known as Clifford's principle") that

it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

He expounded:

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterward, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it – the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

Chignell (2018) noted that this approach to belief is similar to that of John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

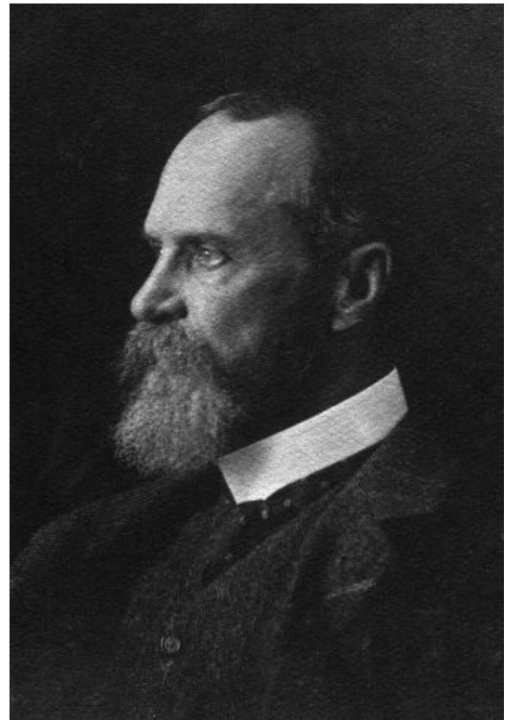
He that believes without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Error.

Clifford realized that a single person cannot sift through all the evidence for everything she needs to believe. Some beliefs must be based on the *authority* of others. However, the believer should make some rational assessment of that authority. The proposers of the beliefs must be honest; the beliefs must be such that they can be or have been verified by those who have the time and experience to verify them; their acceptance should be independent of any personal profit to those that propose the beliefs.

Clifford also considered the *limits of inference*. Most of what we know is inferred from what we and others have experienced. The fact that the sun has risen daily throughout our lives and throughout all the lives of others leads us to believe that it will continue to do so. Clifford proposed

We may believe what goes beyond our experience, only when it is inferred from that experience by the assumption that what we do not know is like what we know.

In passing Clifford noted that we have no *a priori* right to believe that nature is universally uniform – that the future will always follow the rules of the past. This is itself a belief – one that has worked so far. Some beliefs we need to accept.



William James (1842-1910)

William James trained as a physician but never practised medicine. Rather he pursued his interests in psychology, religion, and philosophy. In each of these fields he published books that have become essential to their respective disciplines: *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and *Pragmatism* (1907).

In a talk to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities –later published as *The Will to Believe* (1896) – James proposed that there are situations in which we should believe even when the evidence is insufficient. He describes three necessary conditions. First, the belief should involve a choice between two *live* options, i.e. ones that personally meaningful. Choosing between theosophy or Islam was likely not meaningful to his audience. Second, the choice must be *unavoidable*. Deciding to love or hate someone is easily avoidable – we can just be indifferent. However, accepting or denying the truth of a statement is unavoidable – the

statement must be either true or false. Third and most importantly, the choice must be *momentous*. James used the example of joining Nansen's expedition to the North Pole. To do so could lead to fame and glory; not to do so leaves one with nothing:

He who refuses to embrace a unique opportunity loses the prize as surely as if he tried and failed. Per contra, the option is trivial when the opportunity is not unique, when the stake is insignificant, or when the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise.

James assumed that deciding to believe is much like deciding to act. However, choosing to believe in God is not the same as choosing to join Nansen's polar expedition. One can (and does) choose to act in certain ways. However, one does not usually choose between beliefs if there is no evidence preferring one over the other (see the criticisms of Bertrand Russell, below).

James noted that his idea of the "momentousness" of a belief is related to Pascal's famous wager. Pascal proposed that it is better to believe in God than to remain an agnostic: if we are right, we are granted "eternal beatitude," and, if we are wrong, we lose nothing. James did not enjoy considering religious belief in the "language of the gaming-table." Nevertheless, he was apparently convinced by Pascal's logic. When things are that important, we must believe one way or another or risk losing all. James therefore proposed that

Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision, □ just like deciding yes or no, □ and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.

James concludes his lecture with a rousing quotation from the English Jurist, James Fitzjames Stephens (1829-1894):

In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark... If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that any one can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? Be strong and of a good courage. Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. . . .



The image is wildly romantic. It brings to mind Casper David

Friedreich's *Wanderer over a Sea of Fog* (1812). The concept of the "leap of faith" – the act of believing something despite the lack of convincing evidence – was commonly used in the 19th Century to counter the objections of religious skeptics. The term is often attributed to Kierkegaard though he never used it (McKinnon, 1983).

James had used the image of the Alpine Climber in an earlier essay written in French on the "subjective method" (1877, discussed in Wernham, 1987, Chapter 2):

I find myself in a difficult place from which I can only escape by making a bold and dangerous leap. Though I wish to make the leap, I have never done so before, and I do not know if I have the ability. Let us suppose I use the subjective method: I believe what I desire. My confidence gives me strength and makes possible something which otherwise might not have been. I leap across the space and find myself out of danger. But suppose I doubt my ability because it has never before been demonstrated in such a situation: then I waver; I hesitate; at last, weak and trembling, I am compelled to an attempt by sheer despair; I miss my goal; I fall into the abyss. (my translation).

It is not clear whether James was proclaiming a right to believe when there is insufficient evidence, or whether he was asserting a duty to believe. Most people would support a general right to believe with the proviso that the belief does not harm others. Few, however, would say that we ought to believe something even though the evidence is not convincing.

James has been criticized for indulging in wishful thinking (reviewed in Koopman, 2017). When we decide to believe without any evidence, we run the clear risk of entering a fantasy world. On the other hand, perhaps we should try out new world-views. Provided they cause no harm. Crusades are not allowed.



Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher. He is most famous for his studies of probability, his experiments on atmospheric pressure and his proposal that beliefs might be determined based on what they entail rather than on the empirical evidence – Pascal's wager.

In the posthumously published *Pensées* (1670 Section III), Pascal points out that believing in God leads to a promise of Heaven whereas not believing in God has no long-term benefit. We must either believe or not. So

Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

The following illustration presents the premises that lead to Pascal's wager, and the decision matrix that urges us to believe in God. The estimated benefit of believing or not is

the sum (along the row in the decision matrix) of the probability-weighted benefits when God exists or not. The infinite rewards of belief in God completely outweigh the minor inconvenience of living life as a believer (C_g – a negative value). Similarly, the infinite penalties of not believing are far worse than the transient benefit of a life of indulgence (B_n – a positive value).

Pascal's Wager

A. Premises

1. The probability (P_g) that God exists is not zero
2. Either God exists or God does not exist: the probability of the latter is therefore $1 - P_g$
3. The benefit for believing that God exists is infinite - eternal life in Heaven.
4. The cost (C_g) of believing in God is finite - a life of being good and abstaining from sin.
5. The benefit (B_n) of not believing in God is finite - a lifetime of indulgence.
6. The cost of not believing in God is infinite - death and damnation.

B. Decision Table

	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Believe in God	$P_g * \infty$	$(1 - P_g) * C_g$
Not Believe	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$(1 - P_g) * B_n$

Pascal's logic falls apart in two ways (Bartha & Pasternack, 2018; Hájek, 2003, 2022). First, it does not discriminate among which of many possible Gods one should believe in. If there is a non-zero possibility of an Islamic God who rewards his followers with heaven and casts infidel Christians into hell, the infinite rewards and penalties associated with the Christian God are cancelled out. This is illustrated in the below. The astute observer will note that while the infinite

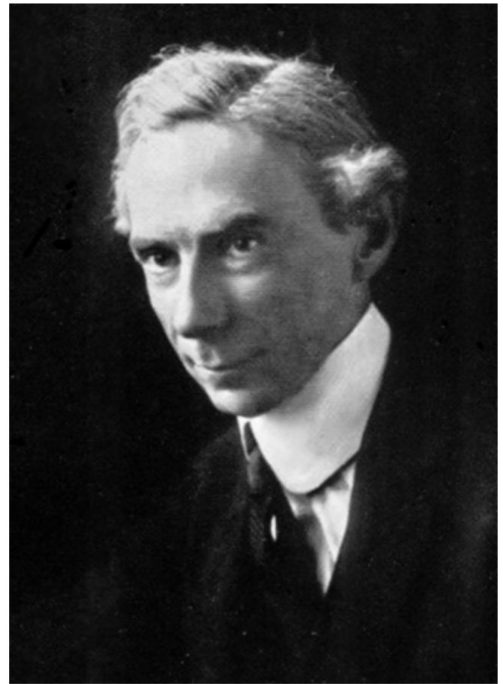
benefits and costs of believing in a particular God are cancelled out, the atheist is still stuck with probabilities of death and damnation regardless of which God exists. Perhaps, this is the human lot. The atheist, however, simply assumes that both P_g and P_a are zero.

Pascal's Wager with more than one God, e.g. there is a non-zero probability (P_a) of the Islamic God Allah as well as a non-zero probability (P_g) of the Christian God:

Decision Table

	Christian God Exists	Islamic God Exists	No God Exists
Christian Belief	$P_g * \infty$	$P_a * (-\infty)$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*C_g$
Islamic Belief	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$P_a * \infty$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*C_a$
Atheism	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$P_a * (-\infty)$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*B_n$

A second objection to Pascal's wager is that it presupposes not only that God might exist but also that God would reward the believer with heaven and damn the non-believer to hell. Among the credible possibilities are a benevolent God who would forgive the non-believer, and a strict God who would damn those that professed belief simply to get to heaven as hypocrites who did not "truly" believe in their hearts.



Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

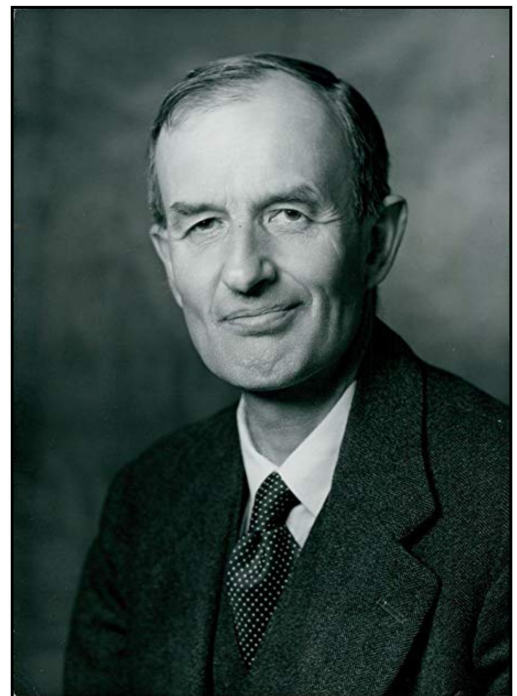
Bertrand Russell was an English philosopher, mathematician, and logician. He is most famous for the *Principia Mathematica* (1913) written together with A. N. Whitehead. This attempted to describe the basic axioms and rules underlying human logic and mathematics. Russell was also known for his pacifism and his agnosticism.

Russell was one of the first major critics of James' *The Will to Believe*. In an essay on *Pragmatism* (1910), he pointed out the James' arguments are appropriate to actions but have no real relevance to belief. He uses the example of a traveler at a fork in the road:

I come to a fork where there is no signpost and no passer-by, I have, from the point of view of action, a 'forced' option. I must take one road or other if I am to have any chance of reaching my destination; and I may have no evidence whatever as to which is the right road. I then *act* on one or other of the two possible hypotheses, until I find someone of whom I can ask the way. But I do not *believe* either hypothesis. My action is either right or wrong, but

my belief is neither, since I do not entertain either of the two possible beliefs. The pragmatist assumption that I believe the road I have chosen to be the right one is erroneous.

However, belief can mean different things to different people. Religious thinkers do not consider belief in the same way as a scientist or logician. In a religious context, one can decide to believe based upon the consequents that the belief will have – salvation, heaven, etc. – rather than on the evidence for the belief.



Henry Habberley Price (1899-1984)

H. H. Price was a Welsh philosopher with a major interest in perception and belief, and a minor interest in parapsychology. His 1961 Gifford lectures on *Belief* (published in 1969) analyzed the many ways in which we can believe.

He proposed that belief can be considered in two main ways – as an occurrence (a mental event) and as an attitude (a mental

state). The occurrence of belief is the moment when a person decides that something is true (based on evidence or on desire) or assents to consider it true. With respect to Russell's criticism that belief is not usually chosen, Price noted that we often come to a belief ("make up our minds") in much the same way as we decide to act. He uses as an example:

After waiting for him for over $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours I decided that John had missed the train.

Belief can also be considered as an attitude: to believe a proposition is to be disposed to act as if that proposition were true. Other attitudes are hoping, desiring, and knowing. Having an attitude may be either conscious or not. An attitude is not necessarily associated with any overt behavior: it simply represents a tendency to respond in a certain way.

As I discussed in a previous post on Belief and Heresy, Price also pointed out that "believing that" differs from "believing in" (Price, 1965). Believing-that is used with a proposition: it considers that a proposition is true based on the evidence. Believing-in is used with things, persons, or ideas: it not only claims that these exist (existed or will exist) but also affirms many other related propositions. Christ stated

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.
(*John* 11: 25-26)

Simply asserting that Christ existed is clearly not sufficient for a person to "believe in" Christ. One must also believe that he is divine, that he died so that those who believe in him do not have to die, that he was resurrected from death, and that he lives forever. Challenging requirements for one of a skeptical disposition. However, the reward is invaluable: eternal life.



Peter van Inwagen (1942-)

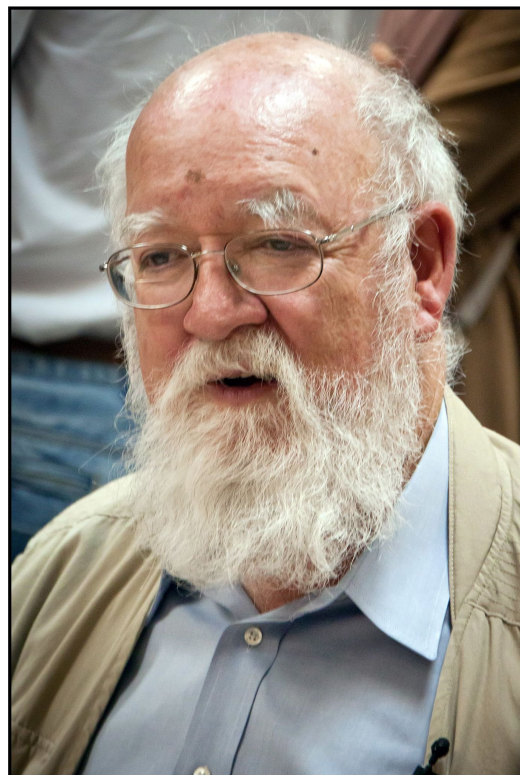
Peter van Inwagen is an American Christian philosopher who has written extensively on the philosophy of religion: *An Essay on Free Will* (1983), *The Problem of Evil* (2006), *Metaphysics* (2002).

In 1996 van Inwagen published a paper commenting Clifford's principle that we should not believe anything based upon insufficient evidence. He initially remarks that although all beliefs need to be based on evidence

a strict adherence to the terms of the principle would lead to a chain of requests for further evidence that would terminate only in such presumably unanswerable questions as What evidence have you for supposing that your sensory apparatus is reliable? or Yes, but what considerations can you adduce in support of the hypothesis that the future will resemble the past?

More importantly, he points out that Clifford's principle has mainly been applied in criticizing religious beliefs. He notes that for complicated issues in philosophy, politics, economics, and psychiatry, the available evidence even when

properly scrutinised often leads to a diversity of opinion. Each of us may have our own insight or intuition as to what is true. Just as we do not consider it morally wrong to have these individual beliefs in philosophy, politics, etc., so we should allow religious beliefs even when the evidence for them is (necessarily) incomplete.



Daniel C. Dennett (1942-)

Daniel Dennett is an American philosopher and cognitive scientist. He has written extensively on psychology (*Consciousness Explained*, 1992), evolution (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 1996) and religion (*Breaking the Spell*, 2006). Together with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, he is considered one of "The Four Horsemen of the New Atheism."

One way to consider belief is as an interpretation of reality. Dennett has proposed that our brains are continually modelling what is going on in the world. What we are conscious of at any moment is as the "best draft" of our interpretive model

(Dennett, 1992). Our consciousness of our selves is an abstract “center of narrative gravity” that we use to interpret our experience.

Some philosophers and psychologists have denied the existence of beliefs (see Schwitzgel, 2019, for a review of “eliminativism”). Dennett considers beliefs (and other mental states) as helpful in interpreting the behavior of others who might have mental states similar to our own. He describes this mode of interpreting and predicting behavior as the “intentional stance:”

Here is how it works: first you decide to treat the object whose behavior is to be predicted as a rational agent; then you figure out what beliefs that agent ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose. Then you figure out what desires it ought to have, on the same considerations, and finally you predict that this rational agent will act to further its goals in the light of its beliefs. A little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in most instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent will do. (Dennett, 1987, p 17)

Whatever Gets You Thru the Night

We have touched on what various philosophers have thought about belief. What can we conclude?

To survive, human beings must understand what they can about the world in which they find themselves. In some contexts, our understanding has become highly accurate. Our perceptions tell us what things are and predict what they will do; our actions manipulate the world. In other contexts – in philosophy, politics and psychiatry, for example – we often have little understanding. We do not know whether the world has a purpose, how society could be optimally organized, or why our thinking

can become disordered. Rather than just accept these uncertainties, we try out possibilities – to see whether they both fit the world and give us comfort. Often these ideas are just hunches; sometimes they become considered opinions; occasionally they become beliefs. Our beliefs are the way we make sense of the world.

Are there ethical principles that determine what we can believe (Chignell, 2018; Schmidt & Ernst, 2020)? We should base our beliefs as much as possible on the evidence available to us. However, we should not retire to an attitude of universal skepticism. We must try out hypotheses about the what we do not know about world. We remain responsible for the consequences of our actions, even if we sincerely believed those actions appropriate.

Contemplating the smallness of humanity in the immensity of the universe is frightening. Our beliefs provide us with some way to handle this fear. In the words of John Lennon's 1974 song, they are "Whatever gets you thru the night."

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Condemned to be Free

When Paris was liberated in August, 1944, everything was possible. A new world needed to be created to protect their regained freedom. The philosophy that epitomized this desire for freedom was “existentialism.” The term, originally used in a derogatory sense to characterize those who followed the philosophical concept of the primacy of “being,” was grudgingly accepted by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir as a description of their thinking. Existentialism fitted easily with the idea of the absurd proposed by Albert Camus. These concepts became the main focus of both art and philosophy in the decade that followed the end of World War II.

Existentialism

Although there were precursors, existentialism was largely the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). They met in 1929 and became lifelong companions, although they were never married and never monogamous (Bakewell, 2016; Seymour-Jones, 2008). Women should be just as free as men (de Beauvoir, 1949). In the *agrégation en philosophie* of 1930, a national exam organized by the French

civil service, Sartre and de Beauvoir placed first and second. Sartre was short – about 5 feet – and the exotropia of his right eye (caused by a childhood infection) gave him a disconcerting appearance; de Beauvoir was tall – about 5 feet 10 inches – and elegant.



Sartre and de Beauvoir were the leading intellectuals of France during the war. In a break with tradition, they were as much creative artists as philosophers. The theory of Sartre's

L'Être et le Néant (Being and Nothingness) was illustrated in the novel *La Nausée* (1938), and in the plays and *Les Mouches* (1943) and *Huis Clos* (1944). Since art is far more convincing than theory, existentialism became more popular than any previous philosophy.

The main tenets of existentialism were summarized by Sartre in a lecture in October 1945, subsequently published as *Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946). The key to the philosophy is the idea that "existence precedes essence:"

What do we mean here by "existence precedes essence"? We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism. (Sartre, 1946)

We could therefore not look to God for guidance as to what was right. Instead, we must create our own morality. In her essay *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations* (1945), de Beauvoir wrote:

I throw myself without help and without guidance into a world where I am not installed ahead of time waiting for myself. I am free, and my projects are not defined by pre-existing interests; they posit their own ends. ... Man may not be naturally good, but he is not naturally bad either; he is nothing at first. It is up to him to make himself good or

bad depending on whether he assumes his freedom or renounces it. (de Beauvoir, 1945).

In addition to being responsible for his own actions, a person must by his or her example be responsible for the actions of others. The recognition of others is part and parcel of the existential being:

Therefore, the man who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which we say someone is spiritual, or cruel, or jealous) unless others acknowledge him as such. I cannot discover any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is essential to my existence, as well as to the knowledge I have of myself. (Sartre, 1946).

And so, we are “condemned to be free:”

If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. (Sartre, 1946).

The existentialism of Sartre was atheistic. If there is no Creator, there is no design that defines the essence of man and that determines how he should act. Man defines his own essence. However, although most existentialists tended to atheism, several religious thinkers promulgated a Christian variant of existentialism (Marcel, 1949,1951; Macquarrie, 1965). In this philosophy existence is a gift – we are allowed

rather than condemned to be free. Faith is an act of freedom.

Being

Sartre had studied the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger in the period when he was appointed to the *Institut français d'Allemagne* in Berlin (1933-34). The title of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) clearly alluded to Martin Heidegger's, *Being and Time* (1927). The concept of existence preceding essence was likely derived from Heidegger's philosophy, which distinguished man from other beings in terms of his freedom. Heidegger (§10) did claim that *existentia* preceded *essentia*, but for him the latter was simply the properties of a being, without Sartre's connotation of a design used in the creation of particular examples (Flynn, 2014, p 237; Webber, 2018, p 8). For Heidegger, human beings were distinct from other beings since their consciousness granted them a particular point of view within the world – a *Da-Sein* or “being-there.” One of Heidegger's numerous neologisms described this as *Jemeinigkeit* – always being my own being. *Da-Sein* was characterized by embodiment, location in space and time, and an awareness of mortality. Heidegger denied that he was an existentialist, though many have so described him (e.g., Kaufmann, 1963; Macquarie, 1965; Flynn, 2006).

Heidegger (1889-1976) had become Professor of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1928, and was elected Rector in 1933, the year that Hitler came to power. Heidegger was entranced by the idea of the German *Volk* and became an enthusiastic member of the Nazi Party. He claimed to have been blind to the racism and warmongering of the party, but his reputation was forever tainted by his support of Hitler. Heidegger was a philosopher who recognized the importance of being, and realized the freedom it entailed. Yet he failed to exercise that freedom with responsibility. One of the main ideas of the existentialism proposed by Sartre and de Beauvoir was the necessity that actions freely chosen must be held accountable.

The Absurd

At the opening night of *Les Mouches* in 1943, Albert Camus (1913-1960) introduced himself to Sartre. Camus had just published a novel *L'Étranger* and a book of philosophical essays entitled *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Sartre had been impressed by these works, and he was charmed by the young author. Sartre and Camus became fast friends (Aronson, 2004; Zaretsky, 2013).

Camus was an Algerian of French origin (derogatively known as a “pied noir,” though no one is completely sure of the origin of the term). After graduating from university, he joined the Algerian Communist Party and wrote for a leftist newspaper in Algiers. When this was banned by the new government of occupied France in 1940, Camus moved to Paris. There he worked for *Combat*, the clandestine newspaper of the French Resistance, becoming its editor in 1944. Throughout his life he suffered from chronic tuberculosis. The 1954 portrait below is by Karsh.



Camus' *Le Mythe of Sisyphe* has the most striking opening of any work of philosophy:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions whether the mind has nine of twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.

Camus points out the paradox of the question. What makes life worth living – whether it be freedom, truth, love, beauty – is also that for which one is willing to die. The absurd rests at the heart of the human condition (Carroll, 2007). The word derives from the Latin *ab* (from, out of) and *surdus* which means deaf (and by association, silent) and generally means

lacking in reason or meaning. Nagel (1971) describes our sense of the absurd as the discrepancy between how seriously we attempt to understand the universe and how arbitrarily the universe actually proceeds. Camus describes it:

What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (Camus, 1942).

Camus traces the idea of absurdity in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Kafka. (The chapter on Kafka was removed from the initial edition of the book by the censors since Kafka was Jewish). Camus finds that the absurdity of the human condition is what makes artistic creation necessary. He quotes Nietzsche (from the *Nachlass*)

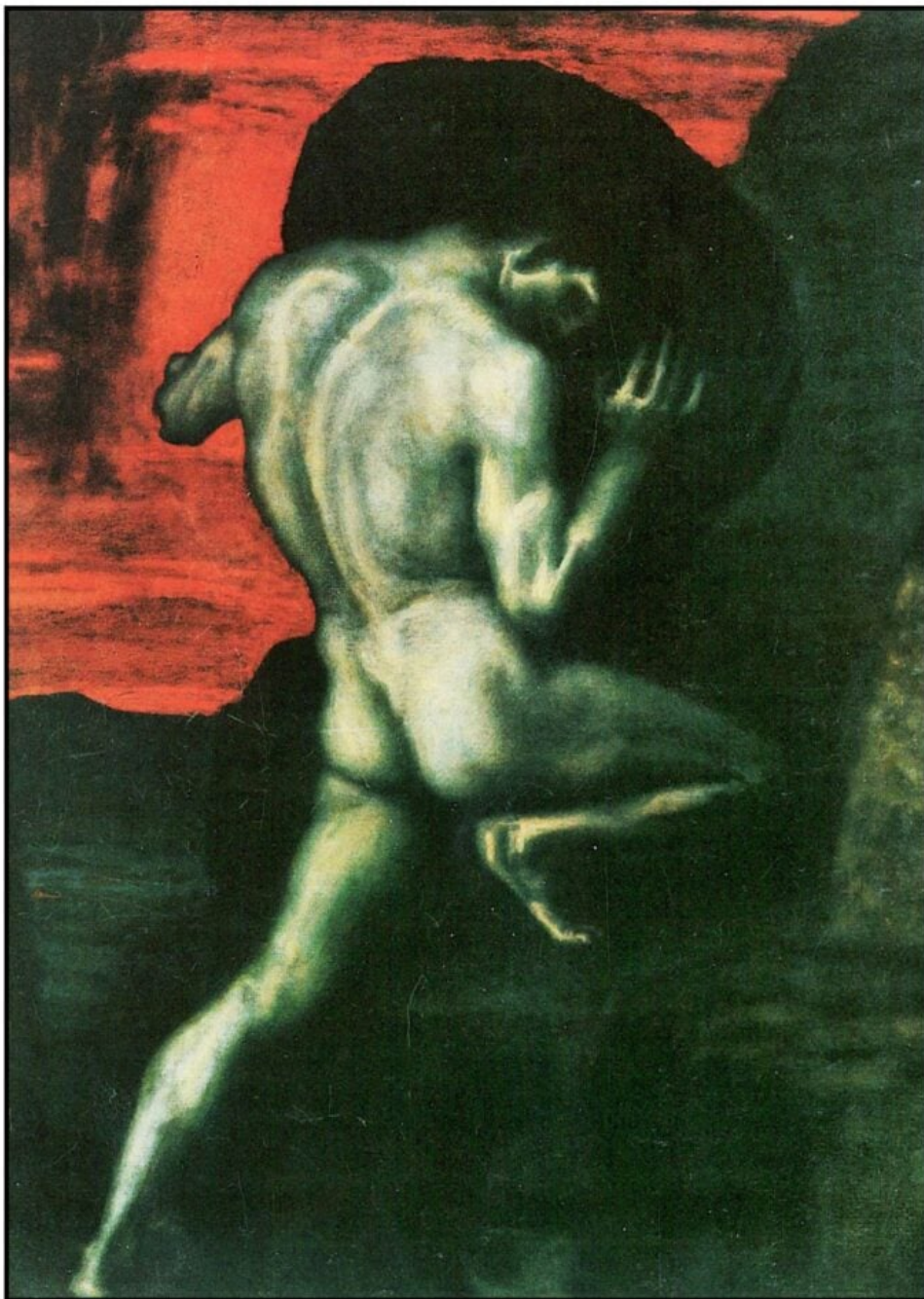
We have art in order not to die of the truth.

And proceeds to describe the process of art in an absurd world:

The problem for the absurd artist is to acquire this *savoir-vivre* which transcends *savoir-faire*. And in the end, the great artist under this climate is, above all, a great living being, it being understood that living in this case is just as much experiencing as reflecting. The work then embodies an intellectual drama. The absurd work illustrates thought's renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more than the intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If

the world were clear, art would not exist.

Camus concludes his book with an essay on Sisyphus. The illustration below shows a 1920 painting by Franz von Stuck. Sisyphus refused to accept death and insisted on living. For this love of life, the gods condemned him forever to roll an immense boulder up a hill only to have it roll back as soon as it reached the top, so that he must continuously begin again. Camus sees in Sisyphus the artist in an absurd world:



I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Darkness at Noon

Between the liberation and the elections leading to the Fourth Republic in 1946, France was governed by the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française, consisting of representatives from the communist party, the socialists, and the Christian democrats. Given the economic debacle of the 1930s and the war against the fascists, politics tended toward the left and many considered the possibility of joining the international communist revolution. However, the institution of the Marshall Plan in 1947 led the French government to exclude the communists from the governing coalition. The Cold war was beginning.

Everyone remembered Stalin's Great Purge of 1937 and 1938, wherein countless members of the military and the government were put on trial for being traitors to the revolution, and either executed or sent to forced-labor camps in the Gulag. The most striking of these trials was that of Nikolai Bukharin, who had written *The ABC of Communism* (the "communist bible"), and who had served on the Politburo and the Comintern. The illustration below shows Bukharin with Stalin in 1929 on the tribune of the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square in Moscow.



At his trial Bukharin confessed to his crimes against the Revolution, but did not acknowledge any specific acts of treason. His confession is often interpreted as the last act of a true believer – one who willingly sacrificed himself so that the revolution might prosper.

In 1940, Arthur Koestler published *Darkness at Noon*, a novel that is based on the interrogation and trial of Bukharin. The title, derived from Job 5:14 by Koestler's translator and mistress, Daphne Hardy, described the state of moral confusion that surrounded the trial.

They meet with darkness in the day time, and grope in the noonday as in the night.

The novel's main character, Rubashov, undergoes three interrogations and finally admits to betraying the revolution, and is executed. The issue is whether it is justified to

abrogate present morality for the sake of a future utopia. Should one deny truth and justice in order to bring about a paradise promised, but certainly not guaranteed, by the revolution. As the epitaph for the second interrogation Koestler quoted from Dietrich von Nieheim's 1410 history of the Avignon papacy:

When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even deceit, treachery, violence, usury, prison, and death. Because order serves the good of the community, the individual must be sacrificed for the common good.

When published in France in 1944, Koestler's novel initiated extensive discussion. Could the show trials, the executions and the labor camps of the USSR be justified by the goals of the communist revolution? How far can the ends justify the means? In the years that followed World War II, the USSR continued to restrict the freedom of its artists, and to conduct show trials of those who had supposedly betrayed the revolution. In his 1947 essay on *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty attempted to justify the purges and the labor camps. Merleau-Ponty later recanted, but Sartre continued his steadfast support of the communists, despite the Berlin blockade (1948-9) and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution (1956). Only when the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, did he finally renounce the USSR's claim to represent the true course of history

Man in Revolt

In 1951, Camus published *L'homme révolté*. The title is usually translated as *The Rebel*, though Camus is more concerned with revolution than rebellion – with changing society for the future rather than reacting against the past. In this work, Camus considered whether violence can be justified in order to

alter the course of history toward a better future. The book poses a question complementary to that posed in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*:

In the age of negation, it was to some avail to examine one's position concerning suicide. In the age of ideologies, we must examine our position in relation to murder.

In his book Camus reviews the history of revolution and terror as treated by philosophers and writers. He considers Ivan's story of the "Grand Inquisitor" in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* as representative of how revolutions end with loss of freedom:

the Grand Inquisitors who imprison Christ and come to tell Him that His method is not correct, that universal happiness cannot be achieved by the immediate freedom of choosing between good and evil, but by the domination and unification of the world. The first step is to conquer and rule. The kingdom of heaven will, in fact, appear on earth, but it will be ruled over by men – a mere handful to begin with, who will be the Caesars, because they were the first to understand – and later, with time, by all men. (Camus, 1951).

Camus castigates the totalitarian movements of the 20th Century – communism and fascism – for promising freedom but, in reality, making the people mindless slaves. The future must not be used to justify violence in the present. In opposition to totalitarianism he proposed, albeit not very forcefully, the need for solidarity and moderation.

Camus, the one-time communist, had come to realize that the cult of history can support crimes against humanity. He had thus distanced himself from many of his intellectual friends who supported the ideals of the communist revolution. His book was lauded by right-wing critics, and led to a complete

rupture with Sartre (Aronson, 2004; Forsdick, 2007)

Sartre, the editor of *Les Temps Modernes* disliked the book's conclusions, but did not wish to review it personally because of his friendship with Camus. Ultimately, he arranged for a very negative review by Francis Jeanson to be published in the journal. Jeanson's critique infuriated Camus, who immediately wrote a rebuttal. He felt it inappropriate to be described as "being separated from reality" given his activity with the Résistance:

I am beginning to get a little tired of seeing myself – and even more, of seeing former militants who have never refused the struggles of their time – endlessly receive lessons in efficacy from critics who have never done anything more than turn their seats in the direction of history.

Jeanson replied to Camus, and Sartre then published a patronizing public letter to Camus, beginning "My dear Camus," wherein he accuses him of a "dismal self-importance" and claimed:

If you really hope to prevent any movement of the people from degenerating into tyranny, don't begin by condemning it without appeal, and threatening to retreat to a desert.

Camus and Sartre never talked again.

The Death of Camus



On January 4, 1960, Camus died in a car accident. After celebrating the New Year in Lourmarin, he accepted a ride back to Paris with his publisher Michel Gallimard. Gallimard was driving, Camus was in the front and Gallimard's wife and daughter were in the back. The car suffered a punctured tire at high speed and crashed into a tree. Camus was killed instantly and Michel Gallimard died several days later. Gallimard's wife and daughter survived.

There has been some speculation that the tire was sabotaged by the KGB to silence Camus as a critic of international communism (Catelli, 2020). However, there is little hard evidence. It is easier to accept the crash as another example of the arbitrary absurdity of human life. Camus had intended

to take the train back to Paris, before Michel Gallimard offered him a ride in his luxurious Facel Vega.

In his eulogy for his old friend, Sartre, who had not been in contact with Camus since 1952 wrote:

He represented in our time the latest example of that long line of *moralistes* whose works constitute perhaps the most original element in French letters. His obstinate humanism, narrow and pure, austere and sensual, waged an uncertain war against the massive and formless events of the time. (Sartre, 1960).

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The Axial Age

In his 1949 book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (translated in 1953 as *The Origin and Goal of History*), Karl Jaspers proposed that the millennium before the time of Christ (or more specifically 800-200 BCE) could be considered an *Achsenzeit* or “Axial Age.” During this period, in five isolated regions of the world (China, India, Persia, Israel/Palestine, and Greece), human society and thought changed radically and irreversibly. A world that had until then been understood in terms of legends (*mythos*) was now examined in the light of reason (*logos*). During this time, “hitherto unconsciously accepted ideas, customs and conditions were subjected to examination, questioned and liquidated.” A multiplicity of gods and demons ceded their power to one universal god or life force. Sages, prophets and philosophers proposed rules for how we should behave. Though the axial age passed long ago, we still return to these teachings for moral guidance.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)



Jaspers trained in medicine and spent his early years as a psychiatrist. Due to his chronic lung disease, he found the demands of the clinic exhausting, and switched his interest to psychology and philosophy. Since he was married to a Jew, he lost his teaching position at Heidelberg University in 1937, and barely survived World War II without being arrested. After the war he moved to Basel, Switzerland, and presented an influential set of lectures on *The Question of German Guilt* in 1947.

Though he disliked the term, Jaspers became one of the existentialists. Confronted with the reality of a world that is beyond our powers of understanding, we have no recourse but to proclaim our own existence and connect with that which transcends reality. The following two quotations (via Walraff, 1970) from Jaspers' *Philosophie*, originally published in 1932, are noteworthy since they foreshadow his later thinking on the Axial Age:

Every limit encountered by scientific investigation provides an opportunity to transcend. There are two kinds of limits. On the negative side appears the irrationality of the

incalculable—the unintelligibility manifested by physical “constants,” atomic movements, and the so-called contingency of natural laws. On this side we are confronted by matter—the other that is not permeated by Logos. On the positive side it is freedom that appears as a limit. The sort of independently existing being that, because of its resistance, physical science could determine, though only negatively [as an unknown and unknowable thing-in-itself], now is assuredly present. The natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) undertake to capture the cognitively impenetrable with their laws and theories; the humanistic disciplines (Geisteswissenschaften) submit the results and appearances of freedom to interpretation in terms of their own laws, norms, and meanings. But the final boundary is, for the natural sciences, the dark absolutely other, and for the humanistic disciplines the freedom of Existenz as a source of communication. This latter leads me to myself.

If everything that cognitive orientation yields in the form of universally and necessarily valid knowledge is to be called “world,” then the question arises as to whether being extends beyond the world, and thought beyond orientation within the world. The soul and God—or Existenz and Transcendence as we say when we exchange the language of mythology for that of philosophy—lie outside of the world. We cannot know them in the sense in which we know things within the world. . . . Although they are not known, they are not nothing, and while they are not accessible to science they can still be thought of.

The Origin and Goal of History (1949/1953)

Jasper devoted the first section of his book on history to the *Achsenzeit* or Axial Age (which was also considered in a brief paper for *Commentary* in 1948). The German word *Achse* can mean “axis” (a reference line about which a vector can rotate, or

which serves as a basis for measurement), “axle” (about which wheels rotate), or “pivot” (a point about which something turns). Jasper was likely using all of these meanings, though the idea of the pivot seems most salient.

This axis would be situated at the point in history which gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be, the point most overwhelmingly fruitful in fashioning humanity (p 1)

The Axial Age gave birth both to our modern rational way of thinking and to the major world religions:

What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognising his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence. (p 2)

In comparison Pre-Axial cultures appear unawakened – “as though man had not really come of himself” (p 7). Mythical narratives that were part of the pre-axial culture were sometimes maintained, but these were interpreted as parables rather than as fact.

Jaspers identified five cultures as participating in the Axial Age: China with the teachings of Confucius and Lao Tze, India with the Upanishads and the Buddha, Iran/Persia with Zoroaster/Zarathustra, Israel/Palestine with the prophets Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and Greece with their philosophers and tragedians. These regions developed the new Axial way of thinking synchronously and independently. The changes likely resulted from the fact that these societies were in a state of war and turmoil, and people were avidly

seeking respite from the chaos (pp 17-18).

According to Jaspers the importance of the Axial Age (pp18-20) was that

a) it was related to humanity in general rather than to specific groups:

It is one thing to see the unity of history from one's own ground and in the light of one's own faith, another to think of it in communication with every other human ground, linking one's own consciousness to the alien consciousness (p 19)

b) it promoted communication and discussion, with an acknowledgement that no one has an exclusive grasp of the truth.

c) it was pre-eminent in its creativity – the writings of the sages of this period have become a yardstick against which all later creations are measured:

Until today mankind has lived by what happened during the Axial Period, by what was thought and created during that period. In each new upward flight it returns in recollection to this period and is fired anew by it. (p 7)

The Axial Age was essential to Jaspers' schema of human history (pp 24-26) which proposed with three main stages in human development:

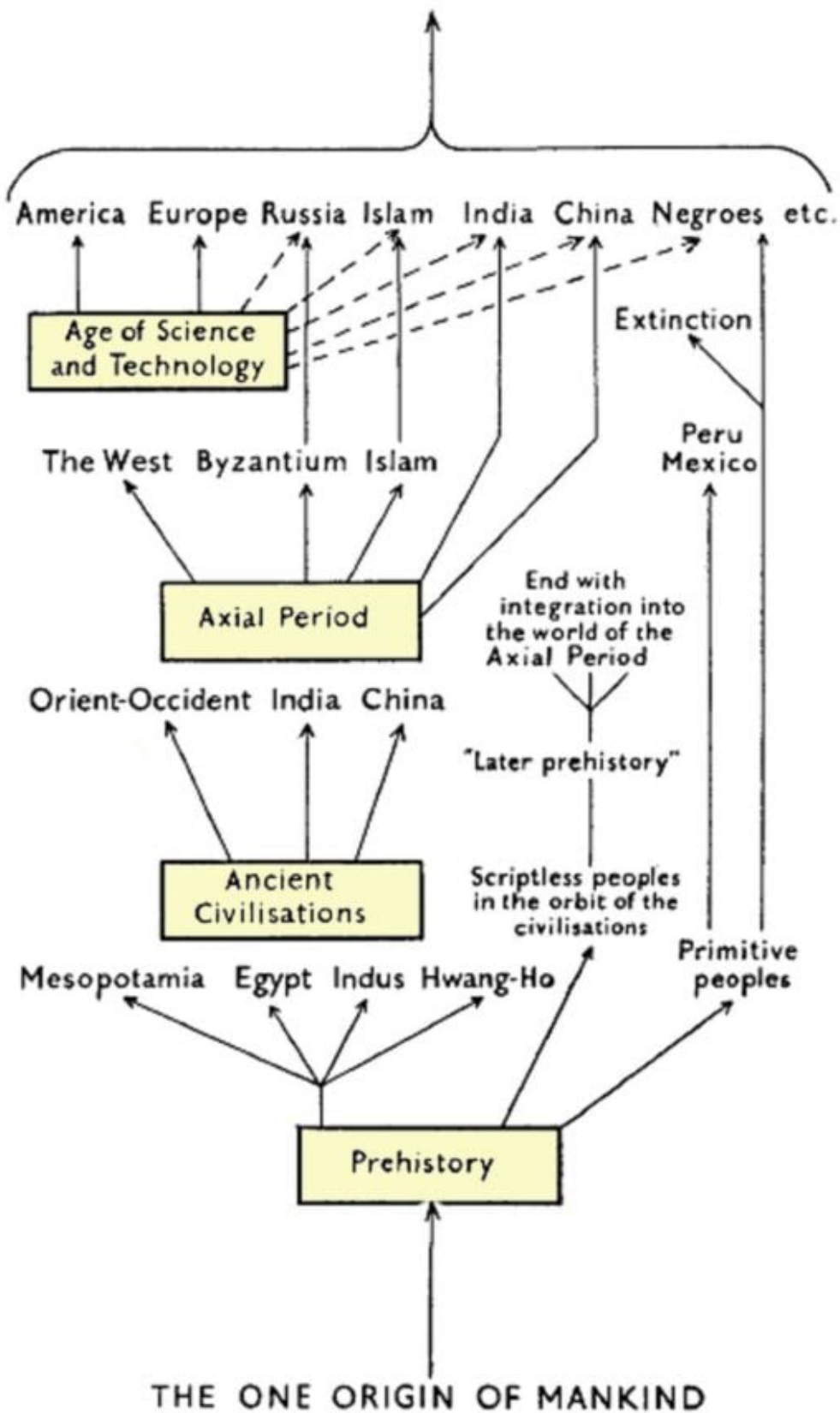
(i) the foundation of the major ancient civilizations in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Northern India (valley of the Indus River) and Northern China (valley of the Huang-Ho/Yellow River)

(ii) the Axial Age in five particular regions (China, India, Persia, Palestine, Greece) wherein civilization was allowed to grow spiritually

(iii) the age of science and technology initiated and

developed in the West (Europe and North America) and then transferred (dashed lines) to other regions of the globe

THE ONE WORLD OF MANKIND ON THE EARTH



Jaspers' thinking about the Axial Age was far from precise, and has been criticized extensively (see Mullins et al, 2018). His characterization of Axial thinking appears more of a post hoc description of the cultures that he chose to include in his survey than any defining criteria for Axiality.

It is unclear why the cultures of Egypt under Akhenaten (14th Century BCE), or of Mesopotamia in the time of Hammurabi (18th Century BCE) were not considered Axial. Perhaps these cultures were too transient to be considered Axial. However, as Jaspers points out, the cultures that he included in his Axial Age also did not last.

Among the cultures that he does include, some definitely predate his Axial Period. Although the life of Zarathustra is impossible to date, his teachings appear to come from the Second Millennium BCE (Boyce, 1984; Rose, 2011). Jewish thought may have been formally written down during the Axial period but its basic ideas originated before the time of Solomon (10th Century BCE).

Although Jaspers stresses the importance of the 1st Millennium BCE to the origin of the major world religions, Christianity and Islam – the two religions with the most adherents in the modern world – began after the Axial Period. The interpretation that

Christianity and Islam fall outside the axial age chronologically, but are historically intelligible only as developments of Israel's axial breakthrough (Bellah, 2072)

inappropriately discounts their clear origins in the 1st and 7th Centuries CE.

Nevertheless, Jaspers' concept of an Axial Age was enthusiastically taken up by many scholars of religion

(Armstrong, 2004, 2005, 2006; Bellah, 2005, 2011; Eisenstadt, 1986; Schwartz, 1975). The period has been given several other names: the Moral Revolution (Halton, 2014); the Great Transformation (Armstrong, 2006); the Age of Transcendence (Schwartz, 1975), and the theoretic age (Donald, 1991).

Extension of the Idea of Axiality

Each of those who followed Jasper fleshed out the description of the Axial Age to include some defining features:

a) the formulation of an ethical rather than coercive morality. People should do what is right and not what those in power demand. Leaders may be necessary but their powers must not be absolute. Every person should have equal opportunities for success in life.

b) the idea of a “moralizing god,” a supreme force who (or which) requires human beings to live a good life, rewards virtuous behavior, punishes the sinful (typically in an afterlife), and always knows when laws are being transgressed.

c) the replacement of the ritual of animal (or human) sacrifice by the life of religious devotion. The divine does not require the sacrifice of animals but rather the dedication of a believer’s life to compassion and service.

d) the creation of concepts not immediately related to the external world. The Axial Age addressed questions such as what happens after death and whether the world was exactly how it appears. As Schwartz (1975) stated this “transcendent” type of thinking was “a kind of standing back and looking beyond – a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond.”

e) the use of external memory devices such as written records (Donald, 1991). This allowed culture and technology to be transmitted from one generation to another without the need for their continual rediscovery.

Seshat History of the Axial Age (2019)



The Seshat (Turchin, 2015) is a data bank of global history, founded in 2011 and used by many different investigators to examine questions about human cultural evolution, economic development and sociological change. These studies support the new field of “cliodynamics” – the science of historical change – a term deriving from the Greek Goddess of History. The data bank itself is named after Seshat, the Egyptian Goddess of Wisdom and Knowledge. Seshat is usually depicted holding a palm stem on which she notches the passage of time. She wears a leopard skin, the pattern of which denotes the stars and eternity. Above her head is a seven-pointed emblem, the meaning of which is not known, but may signify enlightenment.

In 2019, Hoyer and Reddish edited the results of a *Seshat History of the Axial Age*. The study looked at societies in

multiple regions of the world and at multiple times in order to determine when the characteristics of the Axial Age became apparent. Because it is relatively easy to document, the study focussed on the origins of defined moral principles, such as the definition of moral norms often in terms of a legal code, the setting of punishments for the violation of moral rules, the conceptualization of an omniscient and omnipotent supernatural force or being that required obedience to the law, and constraints on the power of social leaders. The study confirmed that these principles began during the 1st millennium BCE in the regions named in Jaspers' book. However, the principles also became evident in other regions at other times.

The conclusion was therefore that axiality was not an age but rather a "stage" in the evolution of a complex society:

the initial rise of archaic states led to the distortion and repression of at least some components of natural morality and that axiality provided a way of restoring those principles, and especially their cohesion-building effects, under the guise of a more benevolent regime of supernatural enforcement in ways that applied equally to rich and poor, the powerful and the meek. Such a restoration, we have argued, was necessary for political systems to evolve beyond the megasociety threshold. (pp 406-7)



Turchin (2018) has proposed that as states or empires reach a particular size (in terms of population) and level of complexity (in terms of the different factions within that population) dissension arises between those who lead the state and those who are its subjects. The state may then fail, either through external forces taking advantage of the internal divisions in the state, or through the rebellion of its constituent parts. Developing a sense of “group feeling” or “collective solidarity” can prevent the internal dissension and help fight against external forces. This group feeling was present in early small bands of human beings, but needed to be reinstated when the groups became larger and more susceptible to despotic rule. Turchin names this solidarity *asabiya* – a word used by the Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) in his studies of the peoples of the Maghreb (Northern Africa). A bust of Ibn Khaldun on the right is located at the Casbah of Bejaia in Algeria.

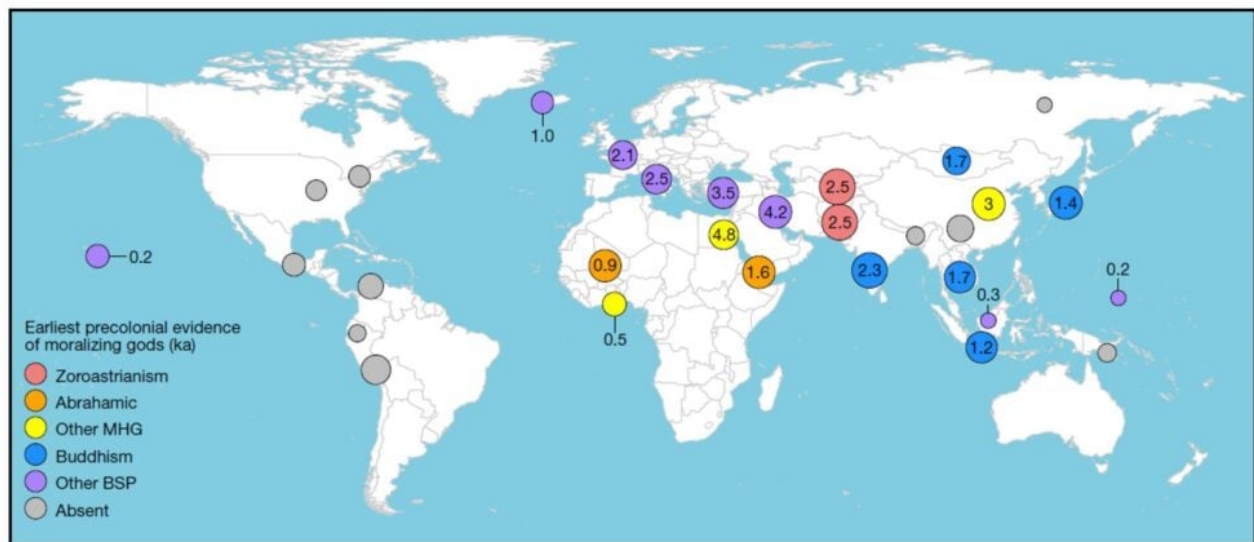
The Seshat data bank has allowed scholars to relate the rise of such moral principles as “moralizing high gods” and “broad supernatural punishment” (heaven and hell) to the level of social complexity, as measured using the principal component of an analysis of 51 measurements of government levels, infrastructure, written records, religious texts, financial instruments, etc. Whitehouse et al. (2019) examined 30 different regions of the world and found that these moral principles only occurred after a significant increase in social complexity.

powerful moralizing ‘big gods’ and prosocial supernatural punishment tend to appear only after the emergence of ‘megasocieties’ with populations of more than around one million people. Moralizing gods are not a prerequisite for the evolution of social complexity, but they may help to sustain and expand complex multi-ethnic empires after they have become established.

The authors therefore suggest that

if moralizing gods do not cause the evolution of complex societies, they may represent a cultural adaptation that is necessary to maintain cooperation in such societies once they have exceeded a certain size, perhaps owing to the need to subject diverse populations in multi-ethnic empires to a common higher-level power.

A map of the 30 different regions that they evaluated shows that the first occurrence of moralizing high gods (MHG) was in ancient Egypt when the idea of *maat* – universal justice – was first proposed 4.8 ka (thousand years before the present). The size of the circles represents the relative complexity of the society in that region.



Jaspers' axial societies are represented by Confucianism in Northern China 3 ka, Zoroastrianism in Persia 2.5 ka and Buddhism in India 2.3 ka. This particular Seshat survey did not include Jaspers' other two axial regions – Greece and Palestine. Although Christianity was and is one of the great religions with a moralizing high God and broad supernatural punishment (BSP), regions of Europe (early Rome and Celtic France) developed such ideas prior to their actual conversion to Christianity. Although large societies developed in the Americas, these were not characterized by moralizing high gods and this (in addition to their technological inferiority) may have rendered them susceptible to colonization by the Christian countries.

Conclusion

Modern religions are characterized by a moral code that promotes the social virtues of compassion and temperance and a concept of justice administered either by an omnipotent deity or by a universal force. These religions originated when societies became sufficiently complex that they needed their citizens to feel solidarity with each other. A sense of morality was a tool for survival when humans lived in small groups. Codified and intensified by the sages and prophets of more complex societies, morality then became the glue that held together empires. Several of our modern religions

originated in the 1st Millennium BCE in what Jaspers described as the Axial Age. However, others originated at other times and we must consider axiality as a stage in the development of any human society rather than as a particular age

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Antisemitism

Hatred is directed anger. Though we can claim metaphorically to hate

unconscious objects or abstractions, hatred is typically directed at another person or persons. Hatred is evoked by suffering that we perceive they caused. Since it leads to actions against these persons, hatred can also be described as “ill will.”

Emotions can overwhelm reason. Passion is not logical. We often hate

without any justification. Hatred must then be maintained by fictions that describe the evil nature of those we hate.

Antisemitism is the most enduring and most unjustified of human hatreds.

The ill will suffered by the Jewish people has lasted for thousands of years, and has led to countless crimes, the most terrible of which was the Holocaust wherein 6 million Jews were put to death by the Nazi Government of Germany (Bauer, 2001; Marrus, 1987). ;

Antisemitism has been inspired by many fictions. This posting considers the unfortunate power of some of the stories that paved the way to the Holocaust.

Some Simple Psychology

Anger arises when we experience suffering, especially when we believe it

to be unwarranted, and when we are thwarted from achieving what we desire, especially when we believe that we entitled to it. Anger seeks to attack these causes: to hit out at those who strike us; to break those who obstruct us.

We tend to think of events as caused by persons. Even when forces of nature act against us we may attribute them to a divinity or a devil, or to those who worship them. Only in that way can anger find a target for its release.

Sometimes the causes of our anger are too complicated to understand or too powerful to fight against. In these cases, we may vent our anger elsewhere and attack other human beings, while inventing plausible (though fictional) reasons for so doing.

...every instance of suffering, every feeling of displeasure, by whomsoever and in whatsoever way it may have been caused, whether it arises from the guilt or from the lawful activity of another person, or through the sufferer's own fault, or without any fault, or even without any human influence, tends to transform itself into a feeling of enmity, to direct itself against fellow-humans and if possible to express itself against them. (Bernstein, 1951, p 85)

As we were growing up during childhood, we realized – at about the age of three – that we can exert some control over our environment. We therefore created a self as the agent of this control. At about the same time we realized that the world contains other agents. These could either help us or hinder us. We became comfortable with those that helped and learned to cooperate with them. We feared the others.

The group appears to be a curious form of extension of the individual. It seems as if under the influence of the necessities of human communal life, human beings who need love and produce hate combine into new, collective and collectively selfish individualities of a higher order; directing their love inwards, their hate outward, their social instincts towards the insider, their anti-social tendencies toward the outsider. (Bernstein, 1951, p 109-110)

Those who cooperated in groups came to have similar desires and modes of behavior. They followed the same rules and sought the same goals. Those who were different became isolated. These "others" challenge our group-identification (Chanes, 2004, p 3). In our search for where to vent our anger, we often light upon those that are different from us. Especially if these people are small in number and not inclined to violence.

While for normal group enmity a certain regularity in the mutual expression of enmity is characteristic, the antagonism between a powerful majority and a powerless minority is characterised by a onesidedness of hostile actions which is fatal for the minority. For the latter is exposed to continual attacks and must confine itself to laborious attempts to maintain its existence, without a chance to resist actively to any extent; even its passive means of defense are totally inadequate and its existence often has to rely on nothing but periodical flight from place to place. This onesided relation of permanent attack and failing defense is called persecution. Weak minority groups are usually persecuted more or less emphatically. (Bernstein, 1951, p 224)

The actual psychological mechanisms that lead to antisemitism are not

really understood. Some believe that there are personality-types that are more easily convinced to vent their hatred on minorities. The role of authority and power is undoubtedly a factor (Morse & Allport, 1952; Milgram, 1974). Those who seek power or wish to maintain it gain great support by fomenting hatred. Propaganda – invented stories – have a tremendous power. For some reason the more incredible the story the more easily it is believed (Baum, 2012). Dehumanization of the victims serves to attenuate our inherent tendency to help our fellows. (Bandura et al., 1975)

For millennia the Jewish people have allowed us to vent our hatred. For millennia we have invented reasons for our violence.

The hostility toward a minority exacerbates the feelings that initially triggered. When persecuted, a minority does not fare well in society and often comes to appear even more deserving of denigration and oppression (Beller, 2007, p 5).

Antisemitism is not caused by the Jews but by the inadequacy of those who need to hate them.

...two psychological characteristics are present in the individual antisemite: excessive hostility and the need (and a capacity) to project one's aggression on other groups. Persons who have these traits generally suffer from feelings of inadequacy and from the feeling that their own personal borders, psychologically speaking, are easily invaded by others (Chanes, 2004, p 7)

We can perhaps conclude this section with two epigrams from Jean-Paul Sartre (1948):

If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him (p 13)

Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem: it is our problem. (p

The People of the Covenant

The Jews consider themselves God's chosen people. In the Hebrew

scripture Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, and then renewed the covenant with Jacob and with Moses. The Jews were to worship Yahweh as the one true God and to follow his commandments. The Jews would then serve as an example for the rest of humanity

I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6).

In return, the Jews would be considered special

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth. (Deuteronomy 14:2)

And were promised as their home the land containing what is now the country of Israel

In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18)

לֹא תִרְצַח

לֹא תִנָּאֵף

לֹא תִגְנוֹב

God's covenant with the Jews was based on their keeping the commandments that he revealed to Moses. Rembrandt's 1659 painting *Moses with the Tablets of the Law* shows Moses holding aloft the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments had been written. These were engraved on two separate stones (Exodus 31:18, 32:15). In the painting, only the second tablet is completely visible giving the 6th to 10th commandments (Exodus 20:13-17). These begin with: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal:" (Hebrew illustrated on the right).



No one is sure what moment in the story of the tablets Rembrandt is representing. Is it when he first displays these to the Hebrews? or when he is about to shatter them on the ground because the Hebrews had been worshipping the Golden Calf while he had been on Mount Sinai with God (Exodus 32:19)? or is it when he returns to God and brings a second set of

tablets back to the chastised Hebrews (Exodus 34:1). Moses' face is shining with revelation rather than angry. Perhaps, Rembrandt has painted the moment when Moses first displays the commandments.

No group of people is perfect. However, the Jews have contributed more than their share to the human endeavor – in philosophy, science, medicine, politics, art, music, literature. And for the most part the, laws that they accepted as part of their covenant with God have served them well. They are indeed an example to other people.

So why were and are they so often reviled? It is unlikely a reaction to theirchutzpah in claiming to be God's chosen. In the Middle Ages this was called the *Insolentia Judaeorum*. Yet every one of the world's many religions claims to be just as special.

One defining aspect of the Jewish religion is that it is monotheistic. The first commandments state that a Jew must obey Jehovah and not even pay lip-service to any other god or idol:

I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

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
(Exodus 20:2-5).

The Jewish religion thus combines the worship of one god with strict obedience to his commandments. As Prager and Telushkin (2003) have suggested, this ethical monotheism may have offended those who followed other gods. Jews refused to follow the proverbial injunction that when in Rome do as the Romans do. For example, the outburst of violence against the Jews in

Alexandria in 38 CE (then part of the Roman Empire) was triggered by their refusal to place statues of the Emperor Caligula in their temples (Goldstein, 2012).

One should respect the beliefs of others. However, respect does not mean obeying rules that go against one's own moral principles. The Jewish people's refusal to acknowledge or worship other gods has continued to the present. In particular Jews do not recognize the divinity of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, Yahweh's covenant with the Jewish people involved numerous other rules of behavior. These included strict stipulations about the types of food that they might eat and the methods in which this food should be prepared. Over the ages observant Jews have thus been unable to share meals with those of other faiths. And although some of the ancient Jewish philosophers – Hillel and Maimonides for example – were open to ideas beyond the Covenant, strict Judaism limited itself to the study of the Torah and its interpretations.

The Covenant with Yahweh thus isolated the Jewish people from the rest of humanity. They could not share the beliefs, the food or the thoughts of others. They antagonized others by their claim to be the chosen people.

So we have the idea that antisemitism is in part caused by the very character of the Jewish religion. This would explain why the Jews have been reviled by so many different people in so many different countries. The following was written Bernard Lazare in 1894. He was a Jewish polemicist who wrote the first defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Yet even he thought that the Jews were partly to blame for antisemitism.

Inasmuch as the enemies of the Jews belonged to divers races; as they dwelled far apart from one another, were ruled by different laws and governed by opposite principles; as they had not the same customs and differed in spirit from

one another, so that they could not possibly judge alike of any subject, it must needs be that the general causes of antisemitism have always resided in Israel itself, and not in those who antagonized it.... Which virtues or which vices have earned for the Jew this universal enmity? Why was he ill-treated and hated alike and in turn by the Alexandrians and the Romans, by the Persians and the Arabs, by the Turks and the Christian nations? Because, everywhere up to our own days the Jew was an unsociable being. (Lazare, 1894/1903, pp 8-9)

This seems so reasonable. Yet it is false. It does not explain the cause of antisemitism. It is just an excuse. It blames the victim for the crime.

The Crucifixion of Christ

In the early decades of the Common Era, Jesus, a Jewish teacher from Nazareth, brought new insight to the interpretation of Jewish law. He simplified the commandments by expressing them as the need to love the Lord and to love one's neighbor as oneself. He criticized the rigid adherence to the Sabbath, and the commercialization of the Temple. He proclaimed the idea of a Kingdom of Heaven. Many of the more observant Jews were disconcerted by his teachings. The Romans were upset that he was proposing a new kingdom. Jesus was arraigned before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, condemned and crucified.

A few days after his death and burial, the tomb of Jesus was found empty. Many of his followers claimed that they afterwards saw him in person. They therefore believed that he had been resurrected. They continued to meet and discuss his teachings. They were either tolerated by other Jews or condemned as heretics.

A learned Jew named Saul was one of those that persecuted the followers of Jesus. However, on the road to Damascus he had a

vision of Jesus that completely altered his thinking. He changed his name to Paul, and began to provide an over-arching theory about the death and resurrection of Jesus. His main ideas were that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah prophesied in the scriptures, that he died to release us from our sins, and that we shall all be saved from death by having faith in Jesus called Christ (the "anointed").

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Paul's major teaching was that one could never attain salvation by following the Mosaic laws. No one is perfect. Everyone breaks the law. However, Christ offers salvation if we repent our sins and have faith in him.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16).

Paul's letters describing these ideas are the earliest of the Christian scriptures. Written in the years 50-60 CE these predate by 20 to 50 years the four gospels, which describe the life and teachings of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus in the 1st Century CE differed in their opinion about his relationship to the Jews. Some thought that the message of Jesus was for the Jews; others that it was for both Jews and Gentiles. Most of Paul's teaching was directed to the Gentiles. In some of his letters he laments the inability of many of his Jewish colleagues to understand God's new covenant.

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

(I Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Some of the gospels continued this criticism of the Jews (Crossan, 1995). This is perhaps most evident in the gospel of Matthew. He describes how the Jews forced Pilate to crucify Jesus, and willingly accepted the responsibility for his death:

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. (Matthew 27: 24-25)

The major event in Jewish history of the 1st Century CE was the Great Revolt of the Jews against Roman rule. This began in 66 CE and culminated in the Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The illustration below shows a representation in the Arch of Titus of the Romans carrying the spoils from the temple. Among the spoils is the great Menorah that once gave light to the Tabernacle.



At this time many Jews fled their homeland and settled in other countries. The Jewish people have been exiled at many times in its history – the Assyrian conquest (733 BCE), the Babylonian captivity (597 BCE), the Great Revolt (70 CE), the later Bar Kokhba Rebellion (132 CE). Though some Jews remained in Israel, most lived in the Diaspora (“scattering”) – far from the land that from the days of Moses they had considered their God-given home.

The Destruction of the Temple seemed to many Christians a divine response to the action of the Jews in crucifying their Lord. Though the Romans crucified Jesus, some of the early Christians considered the Jews responsible. The Jews were thus guilty of deicide and should be reviled and cast out from Christian society. Even if they were not guilty, they should be chastised for not recognizing the salvation offered by Christ – for staying with the old dispensation rather than following the new.

These ideas have long permeated the thinking of the Christian Church. Many of the cathedrals illustrate these concepts by contrasting sculptures of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*. The statues

on the south portail of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Strasbourg from the 13th Century CE are particularly impressive. Legend has it that these were created by a female sculptor Sabina von Steinbach, though there is no real evidence for this. Ecclesia with her crown, holds in her hands the cross and the chalice. She looks with pity on Synagoga, who is blindfolded and cannot see the truth. She holds in her hands the tablets of the law and the lance that the centurion used to bring the crucifixion to an end. The lance was shattered by the resurrection.

The following illustration shows the complete portail. Ecclesia and Synagoga are on the left and right sides. In the center sits Solomon in judgement between the old covenant and the new. Above him is Christ, *Salvator Mundi* (savior of the world). The carvings in the tympanums represent the dormition, assumption and coronation of the Virgin Mary.





The statues of Ecclesia and Synagoga are impressive examples of gothic art. Though superficially beautiful, they obscure rather than convey the truth. The feelings against the Jews that they evoke are a complete betrayal of Jesus, a Jew who

taught in the synagogues of Palestine.

One might have hoped that the antisemitism of the Christian Church would have been excised by the Reformation. But this was not to be. Martin Luther was virulently antisemitic. In his *The Jews and Their Lies* (1543, pp 39-42) he advises Christians to burn their synagogues of the Jews, their houses, and their books, prohibit their Rabbis from teaching, not allow them to travel on the highways, and prohibit them from lending money. Luther was a harbinger of *Kristallnacht*.

Wild Accusations

During the Middle Ages people could not understand why life was so often brutal. An easy way to explain the various disasters was to attribute them to the Jews. If the Jews could kill God, there was no telling what other crimes they were capable of.

On Good Friday in 1144 the body of a child called William was discovered in the woods near Norwich in England. The Jews were accused of murdering the child. No credible evidence was ever found. However, a monk who had just converted from Judaism to Christianity claimed that the Jews had decided to sacrifice a Christian child to re-enact the death of Christ. Several Jews were slaughtered. William was declared a martyr. Pilgrims flocked to his tomb. Miracles occurred.

William of Norwich was the first documented case of Jews being accused of ritual murder. As the years went by similar accusations arose in multiple different regions of Europe (Goldstein, 2012). Many of these cases included the idea that the Jews used the blood of their victims to make the unleavened bread used in the celebration of Passover. This particular accusation was called the "blood libel." It makes no sense. Kosher regulations require that observant Jews never eat food contaminated with blood. Jews go to great lengths to remove blood from meat before it can be eaten.

The Christian Bible contains the Hebrew scriptures in what it calls the Old Testament. Some of these writings described how the blood of sacrificed animals played an important role in the ceremonies of the ancient Hebrews, e.g.

And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. (Leviticus 1:5).

Other ancient Hebrew writings are even more disconcerting. One of the foundational stories of Judaism is the Akedah ("binding"), wherein the Patriarch Abraham, at the request of Jehovah, takes his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him (Genesis 22). Although an angel stays Abraham's hand at the last moment, this fails to attenuate the story's horror. The illustration below shows Rembrandt's 1655 etching.



The Old Testament contains other stories wherein children were sacrificed. To defeat the Ammonites, Jephthah promised the Lord that he would sacrifice whatever came out of his house when he returned from battle. Jehovah gave the victory to the Israelites. When Jephthah returned home, his daughter came to

greet him, dancing and playing the tambourine (Judges 11).

There is also a suggestion that King Manasseh sacrificed his son – the wording is “he made his son pass through the fire” (2 Kings 21:6). These events and the idea that the terrible place near Jerusalem called Gehenna or Tophet was actually a site of human sacrifice are discussed at length by Stavrakopoulou (2004). The practice was banned by Yahweh speaking through his prophet Jeremiah:

And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not; neither came it into my heart. (Jeremiah 7:31).

One can perhaps imagine how such stories from the Old Testament might have allowed credulous people to accept the idea that the Jews might sacrifice Christian children and use their blood for their ceremonies. When one's faith requires a belief in miracles, wild rumors are not easily contradicted.

The main sacrament of the Christian Church is the Eucharist, wherein the congregation partakes of bread and wine that have been especially blessed. According to the church, these had been miraculously “transubstantiated” to the body of Jesus, who was sacrificed to save the world. The sacramental bread is called the host (from the Latin *hostia* for sacrificial victim). In many places and at many times the Jews were accused of “desecrating” the host. The following illustration shows a 1469 sequence of paintings by Paolo Uccello that tell the story of the *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. Both the full sequence and the particular panels illustrating the second and fifth episodes are shown. The paintings were on the predella to the altar in the Corpus Domini church in Urbino. The retable painting above the predella by Justus van Gent presented the *Institution of the Eucharist*.



The six episodes in the predella show

1. a woman sells a portion of the consecrated host to a Jewish merchant
2. when the Jew tries to burn the host, it starts to bleed, alerting the city guards
3. a holy procession is needed to re-consecrate the host
4. the woman is burned at the stake; she repents and an angel descends from heaven to save her
5. the Jew and his family are burned at the stake; no angel intervenes
6. two angels and two devils argue over the woman's body

As the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) spread across Europe in the 14th Century, Jews were accused of poisoning wells and spreading the disease. Many Jews were condemned to death by fire for these crimes. No one noticed that Jews died from the pandemic just as frequently as their Christian neighbors. Nor that burning Jews at the stake had no effect on the spread of the disease. A half century later, Jacob von Königshofen wrote a critical history of these times. The following is his description of the massacre of the Jews in Strasbourg at the height of the Black Death in 1349:

In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it

through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells – that is what they were accused of – and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there. On Saturday-that was St. Valentine's Day, they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the direct cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors. Thus were the Jews burnt at Strasbourg. (quoted in Marcus, 1938, p.47)

Forces other than the plague were at play. Debt caused as much suffering as disease. As the historian notes, "The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews."

Usury

The Old Testament contains several injunctions against usury. Originally "usury" was simply any interest charged on loans. The meaning of the term has changed as the relations between religion and commerce have developed. At present, usury is generally limited to exorbitant interest.

In one of the earliest mentions of usury in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish people are forbidden to charge interest on loans to fellow-Jews although they may so charge strangers:

Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury (Deuteronomy 23:20).

In the New Testament usury is only occasionally considered:

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again (Luke 6:35).

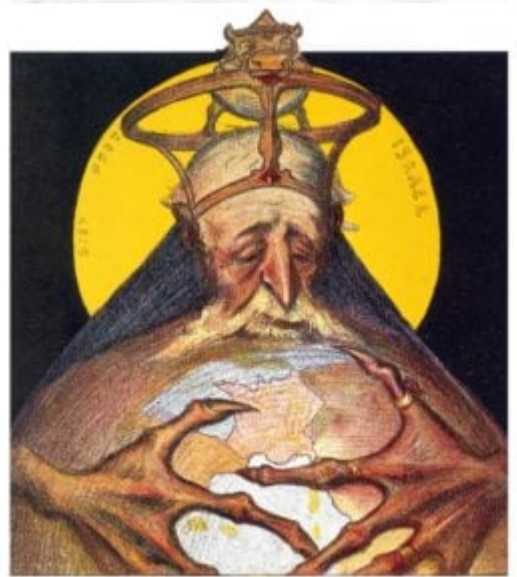
Nevertheless, the Christian Church decided early in its history that usury was a sin (Moehlman, 1934). In the council of Nicaea of 327 CE it forbade clergy to collect interest on any debts. In the Third Lateran Council of 1179, it decreed

Since in almost every place the crime of usury has become so prevalent that many persons give up all other business and become usurers, as if it were permitted, regarding not its prohibition in both testaments, we ordain that manifest usurers shall not be admitted to communion, nor, if they die in their sin, receive Christian burial, and that no priest shall accept their alms. (Moehlman, 1934, pp 6-7)

Thus for most of the middle ages it was difficult for people in business to obtain financial support for their enterprises. Jewish merchants, untrammelled by Christian prohibitions, unable to own land, and often prevented from practicing trades because of exclusively Christian guilds, gradually assume the responsibility for lending money in return for interest (Foxman, 2010). Some kings and princes found the linguistic abilities and financial connections of the Jews appealing and appointed them to their courts. However, most Jews remained poor and unrecognized – traders, shopkeepers, pawnbrokers and minor moneylenders.

In later years the Catholic Church found itself in need of capital to build its churches, and revised its doctrine on usury, founding its own lending organizations called Mounts of Piety (*Monte de Pieta*). The oldest bank in the world, the *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena*, derives from one of these

lenders. After the Reformation, Protestants re-interpreted the scriptures and established their own investment banks.



Jewish lenders prospered and some of our current banks have Jewish roots, the Rothschild banks and Goldman-Sachs being two of the biggest. However, almost all of the world's largest banks were actually founded by Gentiles. The idea that the Jews control international banking is ludicrous. Why one should only consider the religion of a banker when he is Jewish is invidious (Foxman, 2010). One never mentions the Roman Catholic origins of the Bank of America or the Presbyterian origins of Wells Fargo. Yet Jewish bankers have long been game for hateful cartoons. The depiction of "King Rothschild" by Charles Lucien Léandre shown on the right is from the cover of *Le Rire*, April 16, 1898. Above Rothschild is the Golden Calf that was worshipped by the the idea of Mammon, the idol of wealth condemned in the New Testament:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24).

The myth of Jewish greed has become a mainstay of antisemitic thought. Richard Wagner (1850) cannot get away from it even though he is supposed to be writing about music.

According to the present constitution of this world, the Jew in truth is already more than emancipated: he rules, and will rule, so long as Money remains the power before which all our doings and our dealings lose their force.

Even Jewish writers have been convinced of the myth

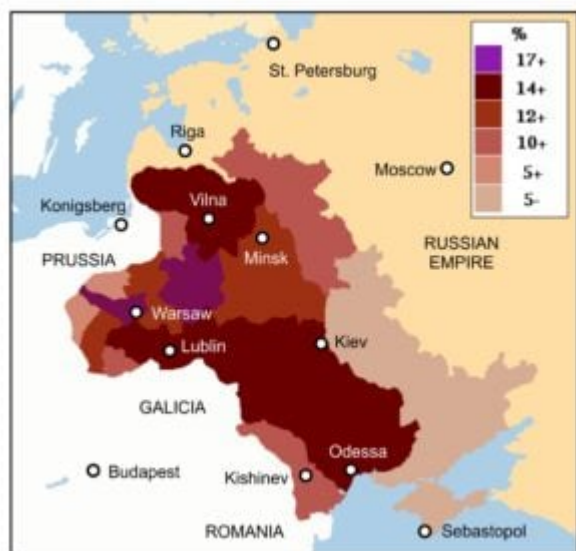
Thus, by himself and by those around him; by his own laws and by those imposed upon him; by his artificial nature and circumstances, the Jew was directed to gold. He was prepared to be changer, lender, usurer, one who strives after the metal, first for the pleasures it could afford and then afterwards for the sole happiness of possessing it; one who greedily seizes gold and avariciously immobilizes it. (Lazare, 1903, p 110).

The Pale of Settlement

As the Middle Ages progressed, the Jews were expelled from many European countries: England, 1290; France, 1306; Hungary, 1349; Austria, 1421; Spain, 1492; Portugal, 1497 (Baum 2012, p. 18). Other countries required that the Jews live apart from Christians in regions that came to be known as *ghettos*, from the Venetian dialect word for “foundry” located near where the first ghetto was established in Venice in 1516. Other ghettos were later set up throughout Italy, and then in Germany and in Poland (Goldstein, 2012, p 130)

Many of the expelled Jews moved to Eastern Europe. They settled in the regions that now form the countries of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Much of this area was then part of the Kingdom of Poland. Polish nobles welcomed the new immigrants. Many Jews were used as tax-collectors. This did sit well with some of the Eastern Orthodox Slavic people who chafed under the control of Catholic Poland. In 1648, the Cossacks in Ukraine rebelled under the leadership of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. During this war, tens of thousands of Poles and Jews were

massacred (Bacon 2003). The Eastern Orthodox Church was every bit as antisemitic as the Roman Catholic Church. Ukraine became independent of Poland and soon became part of the Russian Empire. Later Poland itself would be partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia and cease to exist as an independent kingdom.



The “Pale of Settlement” was set up in 1791 by Catherine the Great. This was an area in the Western regions of the Russian Empire wherein Jews were allowed to live. The term “pale” refers to the stakes that delineated the area

– the word was originally used to describe an area in Ireland under the control of the English crown. Over the years many of

the Jews in central Russia were exiled to the Pale of Settlement. As shown in the map (adapted from Wikipedia, originally created by Thomas Gun) the Jewish percentage of the population in these regions was significant. Around 1900, the Jews in the Pale of Settlement numbered almost 5 million (about half the total number of Jews in the world), and formed about 10% of the general population of the area.

The ghettos and the Pale of Settlement separated the Jews from their neighbors. Their resultant isolation of the Jews increased their “unlikeness” or “otherness.” By closing them off in localized areas beyond the reach of normal civil authorities, it also made them more susceptible to random violence.

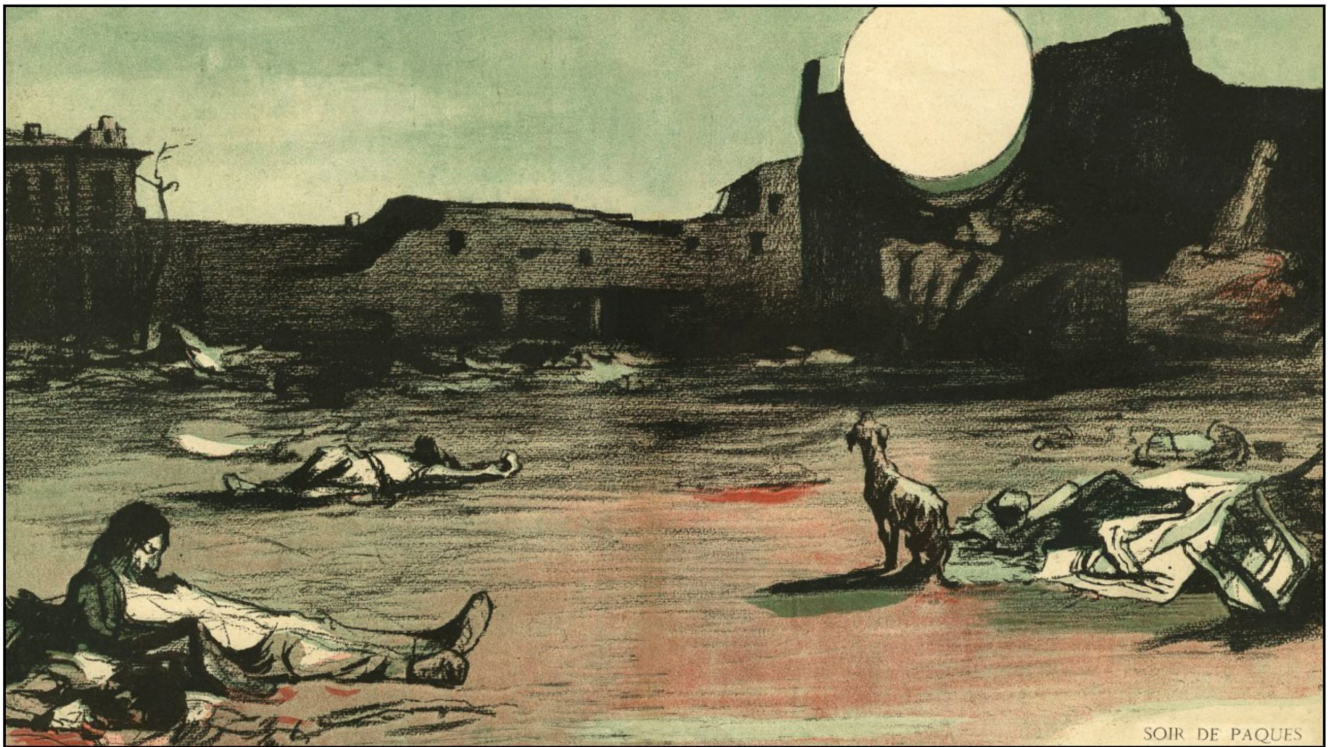
In 1881, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in St. Petersburg by a group of revolutionaries. The group *Narodnaya Volya* (“People’s Will”) was

composed of Russian-born anarchists, but one young woman was Jewish. The new Tsar Alexander III believed that the Jews were behind the assassination and unleashed a series of pogroms in the Pale of Settlement to avenge his father's death.

The word "pogrom" derives from a Russian word for storm or devastation. Christians in a community were encouraged to murder their Jewish neighbors – killers of Christ and assassins of the Emperor. The police were ordered not to intervene. These pogroms continued into for several years. Thousands of Jews were killed.

The pogroms returned in 1903-1906 during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. These appear to have been instigated by members of the Tsar's secret police. One political rationale for these actions against the Jews was to rally the Russian people around the Tsar and against all those that were promoting the modernization of Russia.

The first pogrom of the 20th Century began in Kishinev, Moldavia (then known as Bessarabia), on Easter Sunday in 1903. A child had been found murdered, and city leaders accused the Jews of his murder. Patriotism, blood libel and deicide worked together to create a rampaging and murderous mob (Penkower, 2004). The following is an illustration from the French Journal *L'Assiette de Beurre* of April, 1903, depicting the aftermath of the Easter pogrom.



The novel *The Lazarus Project* by Aleksander Hemon (2008), which tells the story of a survivor of the Kishinev pogrom who immigrated to the United States, provides a vivid description of the violence and its far-reaching consequences. The epic poem *City of the Killings* written in 1903 by the Jewish poet Chaim Bialik to commemorate the massacre begins:

Rise and go to the town of the killings and you'll come to
the yards
and with your eyes and your own hand feel the fence
and on the trees and on the stones and plaster of the walls
the congealed blood and hardened brains of the dead.

The Protocols

At about this time there appeared the first traces of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Nilus, 1906/1922). This document purported to be the secret plans of Jewish Leaders to take over the world. The protocols describe how these elders will sow dissension and confusion amidst the *goyim* and ultimately step in to rule:

In order to put public opinion into our hands we must bring it into a state of bewilderment by giving expression from all sides to so many contradictory opinions and for such length of time as will suffice to make the *goyim* lose their heads in the labyrinth and come to see that the best thing is to have no opinion of any kind in matters political, which it is not given to the public to understand because they are understood only by him who guides the public. This is the first secret.

The second secret requisite for the success of our government is comprised in the following; To multiply to such an extent national railings, habits, passions, conditions of civil life, that it will be impossible for anyone to know where he is in the resulting chaos, so that the people in consequence will fail to understand one another. This measure will also serve us in another way, namely, to sow discord in all parties, to dislocate all collective forces which are still unwilling to submit to us, and to discourage any kind of personal initiative which might in any degree hinder our affair. There is nothing more dangerous than personal initiative; if it has genius behind it, such initiative can do more than can be done by millions of people among whom we have sown discord. We must so direct the education of the *goyim* communities that whenever they come upon a matter requiring initiative they may drop their hands in despairing impotence. The strain which results from freedom of action saps the forces when it meets with the freedom of another. From this collision arise grave moral shocks, disenchantment, failures. By all these means we shall so wear down the *goyim* that they will be compelled to offer us international power of a nature that by its position will enable us without any violence gradually to absorb all the State forces of the world and to form a Super-Government. (Protocol 5)

The reader easily recognizes the confusions of the modern world. Our

natural paranoia quickly attributes this to outside agents rather than to the simple complexity of political forces. Human beings have long imagined that our lives are controlled by secret societies such as the Templars, the Rosicrucians, the Jesuits, the Illuminati, the Masons, and the New World Order (Eco, 1994, pp 132-139). *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* identified these clandestine agents as the Jews.

The protocols are a complete fiction (Eisner, 2005; Hagemeister, 2008). They were largely plagiarized from a satire against the French Emperor Napoleon III written by Maurice Joly in 1864 entitled *The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* (Graves, 1921). The most widely accepted story is that a Russian exile living in France, Mathieu Golovinski, adapted Joly's satire into an antisemitic tract at the instigation of the Tsar's secret police, who wished to impugn the forces of modernization in Russia, and to whip up hatred of the Jews as a distraction from the government's problems.



Despite being proven a fiction, the Protocols have been republished over and over again. The illustration at the right shows the cover of a French Version published in 1934. The

design is loosely based on Léandre's 1898 cartoon depiction of Rothschild. The cover artist goes by the alias 'Christian Goy.' In the 20th Century the Protocols are widely published in Muslim countries, where they serve to foster animus against Israel. Why do people still believe that this tract represents the truth? It is easier to believe in a simple fiction than in complex facts. The confusion of the modern world is caused by the interactions of many different political forces. It is simpler to believe it is caused by the Jews than to try to understand the real causes.

Rootless Cosmopolitans

During the 18th and 19th Century nationalism became one of the main forces in European politics. As the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution undermined the legitimacy of divinely ordained dynasties, the people developed the idea of a nation – a community conceived or “imagined” in three ways: shared culture, limited geographic extent, and governance by the people (Anderson, 2016). Inherent in the concept of a nation was the idea that all its citizens should have equal rights. Nationalism gained its greatest impetus from the revolutions in the United States and France in the 18th century, and from the later Revolutions of 1848 in Europe.

According to the ideals of nationalism, no one should be discriminated against on the basis of their religion. As part of this movement Jewish citizens began therefore to be accepted as equal participants in the new nations (Mendes-Flohr, 1996; Barnavi, 2003, pp 158-9). This emancipation occurred slowly: France in 1791; Prussia in 1812; Belgium in 1830; the Netherlands in 1834 the United Kingdom in 1858; Austria 1867; the United States in 1877 (reviewed in Wikipedia).

Although nationalism wants all its citizens, regardless of their beliefs or background to be equal, it would prefer them

to be homogeneous, all believing in the same national ideals. Yet no nation is homogeneous. The success of a nation depends on how it comes together despite its differences.

As nationalism progressed, suspicions about the Jewish people remained. This worry was presaged by the Conte de Clermont-Tonnere in a speech to France's new National Assembly in 1789. He initially proposed the principle "that the profession, or manner of worship of a man, can never be motives for depriving him of the Rights of Election." He then listed some of the arguments against giving citizenship to the Jews and declared them invalid:

It is here I am attacked by the adversaries of the Jews. That people, say they, are unsociable; usury is enjoined them; they cannot be united with us, either by marriage, or habitual intercourse; they are forbidden our meats, and interdicted our tables. Our armies will never be recruited by Jews; they will never take up arms for the defense of their country. The weightiest of these reproaches is unjust, the others are but specious.

However, he then recognized that Jews may have commitments outside of the nation in which they would be granted full citizenship. They have religious and financial ties to colleagues in other nations. They may wish to be governed by their own laws and judged according to their scriptures. They could thus be a nation within a nation. So he suggested that

you should deny the Jews every thing as a distinct nation, and grant them every thing as individuals.

This idea that Jews were still different from other citizens persisted. The very fact of the diaspora worked against them. With their allegiances to other Jewish communities in other countries, they seemed "cosmopolitan" rather than patriotic. They interfered with a nation's sense of itself. In the Middle Ages the Jew was assailed because he was not Christian. In the

Modern Age he was assailed because he was not truly French or German or Russian. In both cases he was not "one of us."

The idea of the Jews as "rootless cosmopolitans" was (and is) one of the main tenets of Russian antisemitism. It was basic to the foundation of the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist times and it continued in the socialist regime that followed the Russian Revolution. The following is a description of cosmopolitans from Vissarion Belinsky, a 19th century literary critic who promoted the idea of a truly Russian literature:

The cosmopolitan is a false, senseless, strange and incomprehensive phenomenon, a manifestation in which there is something insipid and vague. He is a corrupt, unfeeling creature, totally unworthy of being called by the holy name of man (quoted in Pinkus, 1988, pp 153-154).

Despite Soviet Russia's professed goal of the brotherhood of man, the idea of the Jew as a "rootless cosmopolitan" persisted after the Revolution. It came to a frightening culmination in the accusations against the Jewish doctors in 1952-3 (Carfield, 2002). It is frightening to note the similarity between Communist thought and the Fascist idea of *Bodenlosigkeit* (lack of "ground" in the sense of a place to have roots).

The ideas of nationhood radically changed the lives of many Jews (Arendt, 1951). Intent on proving themselves good citizens of the new nations, they relinquished some of their religious beliefs and behaviors. They became secular. Some even converted to the state religion, hoping to become "assimilated" into general society. Despite all these efforts to become involved as a citizen, the Jews continued to be considered alien. Rather than being welcomed as compatriots they reviled as pretentious upstarts.

And so many Jews began to think that the only solution was to return to Palestine to found their own new nation of Israel.

No longer cosmopolitan they would reclaim their homeland. Zionism would provide Jews with a nation wherein they were not alien (Miller& Ury, 2010).

These new developments made it even more difficult for the Jews who remained in the countries of their birth. Would a Jew support Israel against the interests of the country in which he lives? Zionism raised fears about the allegiance of the Jews, and provided an excuse to exile them from the nations they could not be part of.

So arose the idea that the Jews could never really be part of any non-Jewish nation. This concept was presented by T. S. Eliot (1934) in a series of talks about literary traditions. He describes "tradition:"

What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place.' (p 18)

He goes on to suggest how tradition should be established and maintained:

What we can do is to use our minds, remembering that a tradition without intelligence is not worth having, to discover what is the best life for us not as a political abstraction, but as a particular people in a particular place; what in the past is worth preserving and what should be rejected; and what conditions, within our power to bring about, would foster the society that we desired. (p. 19)

And then he brings up something that is essential to any great tradition:

The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate.

What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. There must be a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural development. And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated.

The remarks about the free-thinking Jews are strange and terrifying. They are completely out of context in a discussion of the literary traditions of the American South. They clearly reflect the antisemitism of the writer and of his time. In the years subsequent to Eliot's book, the great liberal democracies of the world refused to accept Jews fleeing from the Nazi regime in Germany for fear that they would pollute their national identities.

Although nationalism fostered the idea of governance by the people, it also promoted war in the pursuit of a nation's destiny. As Anderson (2016) has pointed out, one of the measures of nationalism's success is how easily a people will lay down their lives to defend their country. Surely cosmopolitanism is a better ideal.

Conclusion

Human beings unfortunately seem to need to hate. We make an enemy of any one who is different from us. And so we revile those who gave us the Ten Commandments. We need to stop this senseless behavior. The main way forward is to learn about those who are not us. This will broaden our understanding. With understanding will come tolerance and cooperation. And we should follow ideals that refuse to be limited to one faith or to one nation.

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Last Night in Sweden



At a Florida rally on February 18, 2017, Donald Trump spoke

about threats of terror:

We've got to keep our country safe. You look at what's happening in Germany, you look at what's happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible. You look at what's happening in Brussels. You look at what's happening all over the world. Take a look at Nice. Take a look at Paris. We've allowed thousands and thousands of people into our country and there was no way to vet those people. There was no documentation. There was no nothing. So we're going to keep our country safe. (NY Times)

Trump's words suggested that something terrible had happened the night before in Sweden. Something like the terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris. Something caused by undocumented refugees. But there had been no terrorist activity in Sweden the night before (Independent). The only recent Swedish terror attack had been over a month ago: Neo-Nazi members of the Nordic Resistance Movement attacked an immigrant asylum in Gothenburg and injured one person.

Trump later said that he was referring to a report on an increase in crime in Sweden since the Syrian refugees had been accepted into the country (Independent). Swedish sources, however, however, have denied any significant recent change in crime rates.

The world is changing rapidly. It is becoming harder to know what is true and what is false. What do we know of the world? What should we believe?

Truth, Knowledge and Belief

Some comments on the philosophy of knowledge might help us determine where we stand in this new world. Epistemology considers what a subject, denoted by **S**, knows in terms of propositions, denoted by **p**, e.g. "Snow is white." The most

commonly accepted understanding is that knowledge is "justified true belief:"

S knows **p** if **S** believes **p** on the basis of evidence supporting **p**, and if **p** is true.

The truth condition is necessary because we may have false beliefs. This occurs when we conclude on the basis of some evidence that something is true when it is actually false. We may believe that a terror attack occurred in Sweden on January 17, 2017, because the President of the United States said so (or seemed to say so), but this is a false belief.

What is ultimately important then is not what we believe but whether what we believe is actually true. Truth is even more difficult to understand than knowledge. Most commonly we consider something as true if it corresponds to something (a "fact") in or about the real (or "actual") world. This approach works fairly well for propositions about the physical world, e.g. "Snow is white." However, it does not work as well for propositions requiring judgment rather than perception, e.g. "Killing is wrong." In this case, there may be different kinds of truth. The truth of a proposition depends on its context. "Killing is wrong" may be false in the context of self-defense.

Yet everything is true or not depending on the context. Even "Snow is white" is false in the context of colored illumination. So we have to come together and decide what we mean by things, and what we consider their appropriate contexts. Philosophy considers this state of affairs in terms of pluralist theories of truth.

These ideas become very complex when we consider predictions about what will happen. We have created laws and theories about what will happen on the basis of what has occurred before. These laws and theories are true inasmuch as the predictions they entail have not proved false when we have

tested them. Laws about the physical world are more easily considered true or false than laws about human behavior. It is easier to know that the sun will rise tomorrow than that refugees will initiate terror attacks.

Most importantly, we usually have to accept the evidence of other people when we decide about what we know. We cannot personally experience everything, nor can we personally test all possible theories about the world. We depend on others to support what we believe. People in Sweden quickly pointed out that there was no terrorist attack in their country on February 18, 2017.

In evaluating the evidence of others, we have to consider several factors. Most crucial is whether those providing the evidence are trustworthy, and whether they have previously been correct in their assessment of the world. A second factor is that our beliefs must be coherent. We cannot believe that there was a terrorist attack in Sweden on February 17, 2017, and at the same time believe that no one in Sweden noticed this. Finally, we often agree with what most people believe to be true. It is difficult to insist that something happened when most people say it did not. Conforming to majority opinion is clearly not as good as finding out for ourselves, but in most cases we have neither the time nor the ability to do so.

The Clear and Present Danger

Given our understanding of knowledge and truth, we must realize that the present state of truth is precarious.

First is the problem of majority opinion. The vicious circle whereby innuendo becomes fact is terrifying. When Trump proposes his belief about something, many people may accept this, both because they trust their President and because it is coherent with their world-view. Then the opinion of these many people can be used to justify the belief. David

Bromwich describes this phenomenon in the London Review of Books:

Trump's most disturbing habit is also his most ridiculous trait: he credits and is apt to repeat his professed beliefs when – and in exact proportion as – he sees other people credit them. We normally think of beliefs as something you cannot choose (unlike opinions or estimations), but Trump does choose and he correlates the numbers of his followers with truth in the physical world. So when, in an interview on 25 January, the ABC reporter David Muir inquired into his unsubstantiated belief that between three and five million people voted illegally, accounting for Hillary Clinton's popular majority, Trump replied: 'You know what's important? Millions of people agree with me when I say that.' The when-I-say-that is essential to Trump's belief and essential to the relationship to his beliefs enjoyed by millions. His belief, triggered by impulsive attraction to something dressed as a fact, is fortified against refutation by the echo of the belief from his followers.

Second is the problem of reliable sources. The world has long depended on the Free Press to describe what is happening in the world. Sometimes reporting has been biased, but for the most part the professional media have tried their best to be objective. The internet has made available multiple other sources of information, some extremely biased and some completely fallacious. Capitalism has contributed to the problem. Monetized websites pay by the number of times they are accessed. Outrage is far more effective than truth in attracting "hits."

Fake news has become recognized as a powerful force in molding public opinion. Yet Trump and his colleagues have now begun to call all sources that treat them critically as fake news. Thus they attenuate any criticism of either themselves or the fraudulent news-sources that support them. As Charles Sykes in the New York Times, one of the media sources that Trump

considers “dishonest,” remarks

In a stunning demonstration of the power and resiliency of our new post-factual political culture, Mr. Trump and his allies in the right media have already turned the term “fake news” against its critics, essentially draining it of any meaning.

In this world of alternative facts and fake news, we are approaching the “doublethink” of George Orwell’s *1984* (Part 2, Chapter 9):

To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just as long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies.

Even the description is impossible to pin down. We cannot even define doublethink without getting lost in contradictions.

Where to now?

How can we now “know” what is going on? On what do we base our beliefs? Somehow we must find a way of assessing the truthfulness of sources. Fact checkers are essential. Probably the most important is the non-partisan [FactCheck.Org](https://factcheck.org/). The Washington Post runs a good fact-checking blog. Another source is [Snopes.com](https://snopes.com/), which was originally set up to evaluate urban myths but now also deals with fake news. We must support the Free Press – this may be our last bastion of reality. The internet has wreaked havoc with the financing of the press. Most people take their news from the internet for free. This may be dangerous. We must subscribe to proper journalism.

The photograph in the header showing the Stockholm City Hall is from Wikipedia.

Note Added in 2021:

The increasing role of fake FaceBook accounts in spreading disinformation is described on the Comparitech website.

In the Name of God

In recent years we have seen an escalation in violence inspired directly or indirectly by religion. Perhaps humanity is just by nature violent and religion is just an excuse. The terrible regimes of Hitler, Stalin and Mao show clearly how evil and violence can exist in the absence of God. Furthermore, most instances of religious violence are perversions of the religion's true goals. As much as religion may lead to violence, so may violence call upon religion for justification. Nevertheless, the recent examples of religiously driven violence are very disheartening.

Religion can embody many of the ideals of humanity. Sometimes, it is as if we take all that we consider good and make this into God. If we so do, we must be careful not to let this process lead to evil rather than to good. We must limit the way in which we use our God. Even if we do not believe in God, we must still be careful about how we put our ideals into practice.

Ten Commandments

The Decalogue (Exodus 20: 1-17) provides the fundamentals for Judaeo-Christian morality. There are several ways to number these Ten Commandments (summary in Wikipedia). I shall follow the most common of the numbering traditions – that used by most Jewish authorities and by most Protestant churches.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God. The first is to have no other gods. This is easy to understand. The second is not to worship graven images. This has been interpreted in many ways. Though some say that it prohibits any representational art, it most likely means that such material objects should not be worshiped as divine. The fourth is to reserve one day of the week for God. This commandment to celebrate the Sabbath is only controversial in terms of which day is to be so honored and what types of work are not allowed on that day.

For this posting, I am particularly concerned with the third commandment not to take the name of God in vain. This commandment is not easy to understand. The following is the commandment (first half of Exodus 20:7) in the original Hebrew (from right to left), in transliterated Hebrew, in a word-by-word translation, in the King James Version (from left to right), and in spoken Hebrew:

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא

la.shav	e.lo.hei.kha	yhwh (a.do.nai)	et-shem	ti.sa	lo
in vain	your lord	G-d (Adonai)	name	you shall take	not

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Exodus-20-7-beginning.mp3>

The Tetragrammaton

The name of God is given by four consonants, typically transliterated as YHWH (Gianotti, 1985; Meyers, 2005, pp 57-59; Durousseau, 2014). This Tetragrammaton (“four letters”) likely comes from the Hebrew verb “to be” in the third person.

The first-person version of the verb is the name used by God in the episode of the burning bush – I Am That I Am (Exodus 3:14).



. Tetragrammaton, Douglas Larsen, 2007 .

The third commandment, which specifically concerns the Tetragrammaton, has been interpreted in many different ways. Since its meaning is not clear, many pious Jews never use the name of God in any secular context, and do not speak the actual name aloud during religious worship. Various substitutes are used, most commonly *Adonai* (my Lord) or *Elohim* (God). The King James Version uses Lord in small capitals to express the Tetragrammaton. Other translations have used Jehovah, adding to the Tetragrammaton's four consonants the vowels from the word *Adonai*. This has no real justification. The actual sound of the name was probably more like Yahweh.

Interpretations of the Third Commandment.



Ancient Hebrew is not easy to translate. Michelangelo's 1515 statue of *Moses* in Rome's San Pietro in Vincoli Church shows Moses with horns. This unusual depiction derived from the Vulgate's translation of Exodus 34:29 describing Moses after he came down from Mount Sinai. The Vulgate translated the Hebrew word *karan* as *cornuta* or "horned." It is better translated as "shining," – "because light radiates and protrudes like a type of horn."(Rashi's commentary).

I have little knowledge of the Hebrew language. The following discussion of the interpretation of the third commandment therefore refers to others who know much more. The meaning of the commandment depends mainly on the verb *nasa* which is given in the second person (imperative) and on the word *shua* or *shav* used adverbially at the end of the commandment.

The verb *nasa* has been translated as "lift," "raise," "carry," "take," and "bear." Raising the name of the Lord suggests the idea of swearing by his holy name: one usually takes an oath

by raising one's hand (Benno, 1992, p 557). A common interpretation has therefore been that the third commandment prohibits the taking of an oath in God's name and then not doing what one has sworn to do (Meyers, 2005). The keeping of contracts is a necessary part of social life (Teehan, 2010; Hazony, 2010). We need to trust that someone will do what he or she has promised. Winwood Reade (1872) described the importance of the oath to early societies:

But the chief benefit which religion conferred upon mankind, whether in ancient or in modern times, was undoubtedly the oath. The priests taught that if a promise was made in the name of the gods, and that promise was broken, the gods would kill those who took their name in vain. Such is the true meaning of the Third Commandment. Before that time treaties of peace and contracts of every kind in which mutual confidence was required could only be effected by the interchange of hostages. But now by means of this purely theological device a verbal form became itself a sacred pledge: men could at all times confide in one another; and foreign tribes met freely together beneath the shelter of this useful superstition which yet survives in our courts of law. In those days, however, the oath required no law of perjury to sustain its terrors: as Xenophon wrote, "He who breaks an oath defies the gods"; and it was believed that the gods never failed sooner or later to take their revenge. (Reade, 1872, p 153).

However, this interpretation makes the third commandment similar to the seventh: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus, 20: 16). One might differentiate the two by saying that the third concerns promises to do something in the future and the seventh testimony about something in the past or present, but both ideas require swearing.

If the verb *nasa* is interpreted as "carry," one can interpret the third commandment as forbidding hypocrisy. One must not

present oneself as a follower of JHWH without living by his teachings. Matthew Henry said that the commandment prohibited “making a profession of God’s name, but not living up to that profession” (Henry, 1710, p 644).

If *nasa* is interpreted simply as “take,” the meaning of the commandment is determined by the adverbial *shav*, which describes the way in which the name is not to be taken. This word *shav* is uncommon and difficult to interpret. It is usually translated as “emptiness” or “vanity.” The third commandment is therefore commonly interpreted as prohibiting the profane or trivial use of God’s name. The name of God should not be associated with angry expostulations – cursing in the everyday sense of the word. The sacred name should not be thus blasphemed.

Shav can also mean “illusion,” “deception” or “falseness.” Thus the commandment can forbid the invocation of God’s name in magical conjuration (Buber, 1976, p 194; Alter, 2004 p 430) – cursing in the voodoo sense of the word. Sometimes, *shav* can mean a false thing such as an idol. Thus Staples (1939) suggested that the third commandment prohibited giving the name of JHWH to other gods – assimilating other false beliefs into the true faith. This interpretation, however, makes the third commandment merely a corollary of the first two.

Some commentators have interpreted *shav* as related to *shoah*, which means “devastation,” “storm,” “disaster” or “destruction.” Childs (1974, p 411) also considers that the word may also include the idea of “malice” or “evil.” This is the meaning that I think the commandment intends: not to do evil in the name of God. This more general formulation would subsume those specific meanings already considered.

Evil in the Name of God

This interpretation fits with the suggestion that the third commandment should be more widely and importantly interpreted

than is commonly done (e.g. Meyers, 2005). This would befit its being listed as third among the ten. Gerhard von Rad has proposed

The purpose of this command is to say “no” thoroughly and completely to that desire that lies so deep in the heart of man, the desire to infringe the freedom of God (Von Rad, 2012, pp 24-25).

This idea is not easy to understand. God’s purpose is good. We should take care lest we subvert this purpose and do evil in His name.

This is perhaps the true meaning of the commandment. Religion tends so easily to the position that believers are right and infidels are wrong. Ultimately, this leads to idea that the infidels should be destroyed. Much of the Hebrew Bible describes how the Israelites waged war on those who did not believe in their God. The times have not changed. In the past fifty years, factions within all major religions have committed atrocities in the name of their God (Juergensmeyer, 2003).

John Teehan (2010) has reviewed the evolution of religious violence. He points to the division between those who believe and those who do not, the lack of critical thinking that often goes with faith, and the idea of some cosmic battle between good and evil:

The initial move is to discriminate between an in-group and an out-group, with a set of practices and/or beliefs that function as signals of commitment to the in-group. Next, there is a differential in moral evaluation of the two sides of the divide: The in-group is owed a higher level of moral consideration and accorded a greater level of moral protection than those outside the group or those who defect from the group. Thus far, this structure is not unique to religious violence, it simply flows from the basic

evolutionary strategies for allowing systems of reciprocity to develop and group cohesion to form. Religion comes into play with the integration of one or more minimally counterintuitive concepts (e.g., gods) into the moral matrix. *God* comes to represent the moral bonds that hold a community together and functions as both legislator and enforcer of the group's moral code. This gives that moral code a heightened sense of significance and obligation. Commitment to that god can then function socially and psychologically as a signal of commitment to the group. Also, by clothing the social code of the group in divine authority it can relieve the individual of responsibility for the consequences of his or her decisions ("If god commands, I must obey").

Consequent to this is that the out-group, by virtue of being the out-group, is not aligned with that god, or is not in proper relationship to that god. This further distinguishes the moral status of the two groups and leads to an escalation of the stakes at play. This becomes even more dramatic in universalist systems. In this case the out-group is not simply "other" but, in being aligned against God, is in league with evil itself. Inter-group conflict is no longer simply a competition between two groups seeking to promote their own interests, it is now a cosmic struggle with no middle ground available, and nothing short of victory acceptable. (Teehan, 2010, p 174).

Importance of the Third Commandment

I am not interpreting the Decalogue as the word of God. Or at least not in the sense that a God dictated it to Moses. Whatever one's beliefs, the Ten Commandments are an impressive summary of the principles of human morality. They concisely delineate the behaviors that we have learned to forbid for the benefit of human society.

And I am not interpreting the God of the first three commandments as necessarily existing. Or as being a person

rather than a universal force like in the Eastern religions. God could easily be considered as the abstract representation of human purpose and morality: what we have set as our goal and how we wish to get there. Human beings think in this way. To do away with such religion is to remove a powerful force for good.

The problem with the idea of believing either in a real God or in an abstract principle that we call God is that it makes us think that we know the truth. We then consider those who think of God differently and those who refuse to accept the idea of God as misguided. Perhaps even evil. Since violence is part of our nature, this may sometimes lead us to do terrible things – and to do these in the name of God.

I think that those who put together the Ten Commandments had some inkling of these problems. One should not use the name of God to justify actions such as murder that are forbidden by the later commandments. Those who counsel murder in the name of God are false prophets. I am suggesting that the third commandment urges us not to use God's name to justify evil.

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Shostakovich: Music and Meaning

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was the greatest of the Soviet

composers. Unlike Prokofiev, who spent many years abroad, Shostakovich lived all of his adult life in the Soviet Union (1922-1991). His relations with the state were difficult. Artists do not work easily in a dictatorship.

Shostakovich talked very little about his music. His work evokes powerful emotions, but what Shostakovich means often remains unclear. Although much of his music appeared to glorify Soviet Communism, recent writers such as Volkov (1979) and MacDonald (1990) have suggested that many of his works carried subversive meanings. His life, like his music, has had many interpretations.

This posting considers some of the issues of interpretation. In a society wherein one is afraid to say what one thinks or feels, history becomes uncertain. And music is often ambiguous.

Early Life

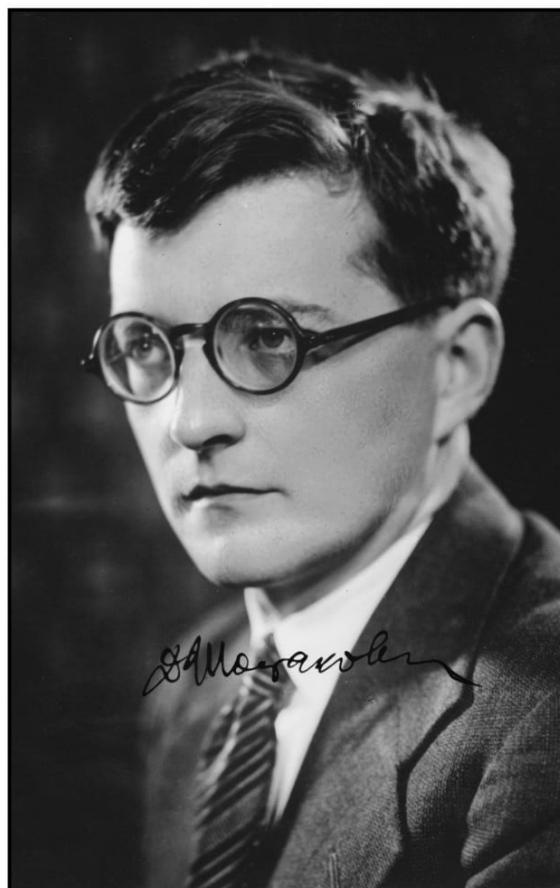
Dmitri Shostakovich entered the conservatory in St Petersburg in 1919 at the age of thirteen and studied both piano and composition. His graduation piece, *Opus 1 Symphony No. 1* (1926) was well received. He was granted a professorship at the Leningrad Conservatory.

However, his later compositions were not as highly regarded. Dissonance did not attract the proletariat. Russia's new society had initially embraced modernism. However, the politicians soon decided that the new forms of art were not really revolutionary but rather were symptomatic of bourgeois decadence, and called for a return to the simple forms of the people.

After his father died in 1922, the student Shostakovich earned money to support his family by playing music for the cinema (Fay, 2000, p. 28). His *Opus 35 Piano Concerto No. 1* conveys in its ending a sense of the madcap pursuits of these silent movies. The piano briefly quotes Beethoven's *Opus 129 Rondo*:

Rage over a Lost Penny. Beethoven – ever the revolutionary – was one of the few classical composers still revered in Soviet Russia.

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovich-piano-1-ending.mp3>



This signed photograph was taken in the early 1930s – at the time of the first piano concerto. A confident young man beginning to make his mark. However, his early success was not to last.

Lady Macbeth

Dmitri Shostakovich first ran afoul of the Communist government for his opera *Opus 29 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* which was first performed in 1934 to favorable reviews. The opera is a tale of oppression, lust and murder. Its tone veers between satire and tragedy. Opera had always portrayed intense emotions. Modernism considered these high emotions in lowly people rather than aristocrats – Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* is perhaps a precursor to Shostakovich's opera.

The opera opens with Katerina Izmailova waking up from her lonely and loveless bed. The music is languid but “endowed with the lyric intonations of Russian folk song” (Taruskin, 1989):

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/lady-macbeth-beginning.mp3>

Katerina flirts with one of the workers in her husband's store. He later rapes her. The music of this scene is graphic:

The rape music reaches its climax with an unmistakable *ejaculatio praecox*, followed by a leisurely detumescence. The salacious trombone glissandos that portray the behavior of Sergei's member achieved instant world fame when an American magazine dubbed them an exercise in “pornophony.” (Taruskin, 1989, the reference is to a review in the *New York Sun*).

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/lady-macbeth-rape.mp3>

Katerina and her lover go on to murder her father-in-law and her husband. At the end, justice is served and they are both sentenced to Siberia. Her lover rejects her and takes up with another convict. Katerina casts herself and her rival to their death in an icy river.

Stalin did not see the opera until 1936. He did not like it. Two days later an anonymous editorial in the newspaper Pravda denounced it as a "Muddle instead of Music."

From the first minute, the listener is shocked by deliberate dissonance, by a confused stream of sound. Snatches of melody, the beginnings of a musical phrase, are drowned, emerge again, and disappear in a grinding and squealing roar. To follow this "music" is most difficult; to remember it, impossible. Thus it goes, practically throughout the entire opera. The singing on the stage is replaced by shrieks. If the composer chances to come upon the path of a clear and simple melody, he throws himself back into a wilderness of musical chaos – in places becoming cacophony. The expression which the listener expects is supplanted by wild rhythm. ...

The composer of Lady Macbeth was forced to borrow from jazz its nervous, convulsive, and spasmodic music in order to lend "passion" to his characters. While our critics, including music critics, swear by the name of socialist realism, the stage serves us, in Shostakovich's creation, the coarsest kind of naturalism. ...

The composer apparently never considered the problem of what the Soviet audience looks for and expects in music. As though deliberately, he scribbles down his music, confusing all the sounds in such a way that his music would reach only the effete "formalists" who had lost all their wholesome taste. He ignored the demand of Soviet culture that all coarseness and savagery be abolished from every corner of Soviet life. Some critics call the glorification of the merchants' lust a satire. But there is no question of satire here. The composer has tried, with all the musical and dramatic means at his command, to arouse the sympathy of the spectators for the coarse and vulgar inclinations and behavior of the merchant woman Katerina Izmailova ... (from translation of review)

Many believed that the review had been written or dictated by Stalin himself. Volkov (2004, pp 105-106) points out that some of the criticisms, such as “create originality by cheap originalizing,” were nonsensical and would never have got by the editors unless they had been too frightened to change them.

What Stalin and his colleagues wanted was music to inspire the masses. In a speech to the Union of Socialist Writers in 1932, Stalin had called on them to be the “engineers of human souls” (Ross, 2007, p 225). The party fostered the idea of socialist realism – art that portrayed the triumph of the people. Art should be representational, uplifting, and easily understood by the proletariat. Formalism was anathema. Art for art’s sake was a reversion to bourgeois decadence.

Shostakovich was devastated. He withdrew his Symphony No. 4 from performance for fear it would further offend the politicians, and published no other music until Symphony No. 5 late in 1937.

The Great Terror

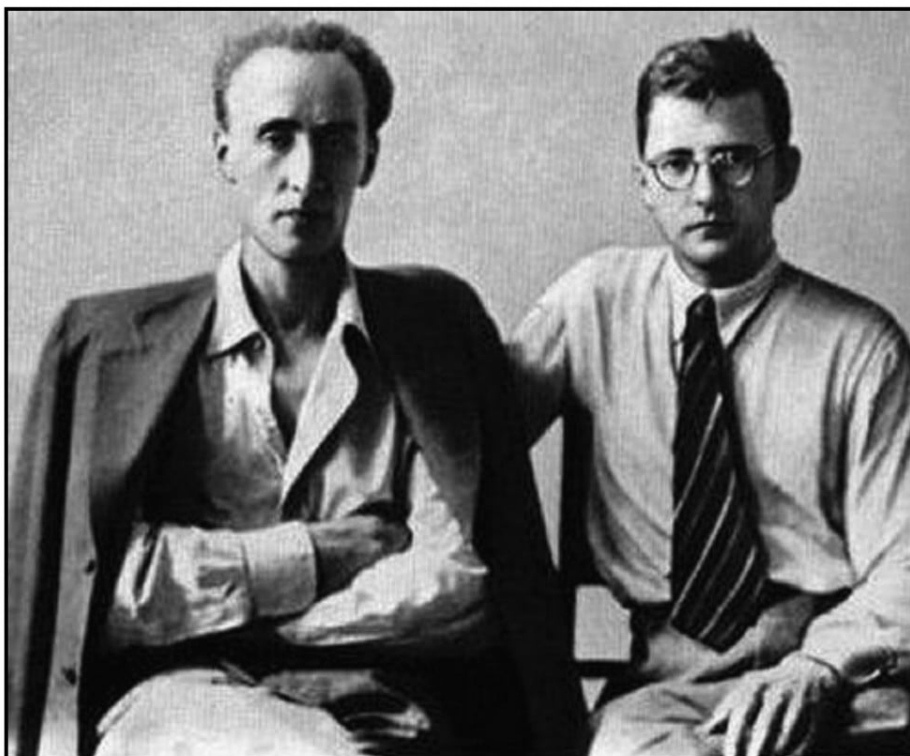
This was the time of the Great Terror (Conquest, 1968). Society was to be purged of those that impeded the progress of Socialism. Show trials brought politicians, generals and artists to confession and abasement. Exile to the Gulag or summary executions followed. Many of his friends and family were arrested and sent to labor camps. Shostakovich was justifiably in fear for his life.

The composer Basner (quoted in Wilson, 1994, p 126) recalled that in the spring of 1937 Shostakovich was summoned to the security police, and interrogated about his relationship to Marshal Tukhachevsky. The Marshal, a great music lover and competent violinist, had often invited Shostakovich to his house to talk about music and to play together. Shostakovich was asked if politics were discussed at these meetings.

Shostakovich denied this, but the security officer then told him to return in two days: "By that day you will without fail remember everything. You must recall every detail of the plot against Stalin of which you were a witness." Shostakovich assumed that he would be arrested, and slept on the landing of his apartment so that the police would not disturb his family. However, on his return to the 'big house,' he found out that the officer who had interrogated him had himself been arrested, and Shostakovich's name was no longer listed among the suspects. Tuckhachevsky was executed on June 12, 1937.

Symphony No. 5

During this period of fear and death, Shostakovich composed his *Opus 47 Symphony No. 5*, first performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra on November 21, 1937 under the direction of Yevgeny Mravinsky.



The symphony was a tremendous success. The largo moved the audience to tears and the finale had them on their feet. A member of the audience described the response:

Many of the listeners started to rise automatically from their seats during the finale, one after the other. The music had a sort of electric force. A thunderous ovation shook the columns of the white Philharmonic Hall, and Evgeny Mravinsky lifted the score high above his head so as to show that it was not he, the conductor, or the orchestra who deserved this storm of applause, these shouts of 'bravo'; the success belonged to the creator of this work. (Wilson, 1994, p 126)

What the symphony means remains unclear. The politically correct interpretation was that it represented the life of the Socialist artist, overcoming his initial tribulations and finally realizing the full power of the people. Shostakovich agreed to the subtitle "A Soviet Artist's Response to Just Criticism." Taruskin (1995) summarizes an influential review of the symphony by Alexei Tolstoy:

In the first movement the author-hero's 'psychological torments reach their crisis and give way to ardour', the use of the percussion instruments suggesting mounting energy. The second movement, a sort of breather, is followed by the most profound moment, the Largo. 'Here the *stanovleniye lichnosti* [formation of a personality] begins. It is like a flapping of the wings before take-off. Here the personality submerges itself in the great epoch that surrounds it, and begins to resonate with the epoch.' The finale is the culmination, in which 'the profundity of the composer's conception and the orchestral sonority coincide', producing 'an enormous optimistic lift.'

This interpretation is impossible to fit with the actual music. The crux of the symphony is the Largo, the movement that brought the audience to tears. The movement has the solemn rhythms and mystical harmonies of the Orthodox liturgy (Taruskin, 1995; Tilson Thomas, 2005). The following clip gives the last few minutes of the movement, ending on the sublime notes of harp and celesta:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovich-symphony-5-largo-ending.mp3>

It is impossible not to hear this as a lament, a requiem for the people who had died during the Great Terror. At a time when religious services were not allowed, people found solace in music. Zoya Leybin describes the audience's response to the Largo:

They could relate to this music. It had the Russian soul in it, had a power. And people felt connected. They couldn't pray, so music became religion. (in Tilson Thomas, 2009).

In a poem dedicated to Shostakovich, Anna Akhmatova (quoted by Bullock, 2010) described music as the friend that would never betray or deny her:

Something miraculous burns within her
And in her eyes, lines come into sharper focus.
She is the only one to speak with me,
When others are afraid to approach.
When the final friend had averted his gaze
She was with me in my grave
And sang like the first storm,
Or as if all the flowers had begun to speak.

The last movement of the symphony begins with an enthusiastic march. However, this soon ends and echoes of the preceding movement return. Taruskin (1995) quotes Mravinsky

somewhere in the middle of the movement the quick tempo spends itself and the music seemingly leans against some sort of obstacle and then forces itself onward.

During this interlude, Shostakovich quotes some phrases from his Opus 46 setting of a Pushkin Song called *Rebirth*, a work that was not published or performed until much later (Ross, 2007, p 235; Bullock, 2010). One cannot tell whether the music was just in his mind, whether he wished to bring the text of

the poem to mind, or whether he was relating Pushkin's lines to Stalin's suppression of the arts. The poem begins

A barbarian artist with a lazy brush
blackens out the painting of a genius
tracing senselessly over it
his own illegitimate drawing.

The poem then goes on to tell how over the years the paint flaked away to reveal the masterpiece. We must look below the present surface to find the original beauty.

After the interlude, the symphony goes on with a march that has led to many conflicting interpretations. According to Volkov, Shostakovich considered the exuberance of this final march as forced:

It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing,' and you rise, shakily, and go marching off, muttering 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing.' (Volkov, 1979, p 183)

Volkov's book has been considered by some as a fraud, a compendium of Shostakovich's writings strung together with Volkov's ideas (e.g. Fay, 2004. Taruskin, 1995). Nevertheless, some of the bitterness is undoubtedly true. And it is impossible not to consider this quote when listening to the finale.

Different conductors have used different tempos for this ending. In his documentary on Shostakovich, Aranovich (1981) juxtaposed without judgment the slow solemn rhythm of Mravinsky to the frantically rushed tempo of Bernstein. Slow is much more powerful:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovish-5-ending-mravinsky.mp3>

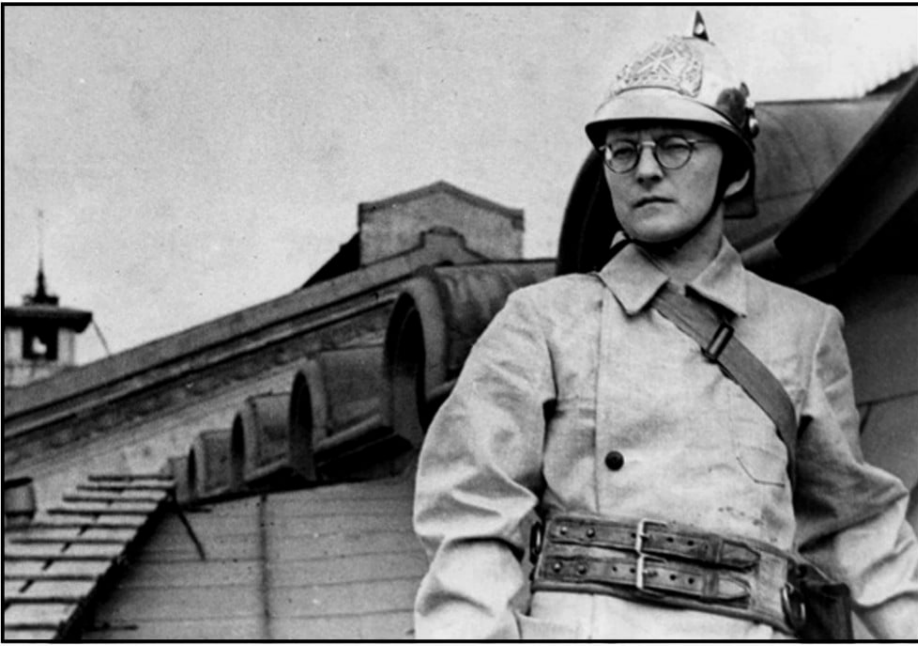
Yet this does not mean that Volkov's interpretation is correct. The message underlying the symphony's ending is not triumph but it is also not despair. Other interpretations consider the coda as much more personal, repenting Shostakovich's need to survive or his inability of to defeat evil with his art. I think that it conveys the resilience of humanity despite the current tragedy. We shall survive. This interpretation is not common (but see a review *A Pillar to Help Humanity Prevail* by Jeff Wall)

The wonder of music is that it resists only one interpretation. Margarita Mazo recalled:

For many of us, listening to a new piece by Shostakovich was a sacred experience. Was he a dissident or was he not? Was he a Communist or was he not? He was so much more complex than that. Besides, can you tell music with words? Can you say with words what this music is about? If so, then why do you need music? (quoted in Mitchinson, 2002, pp 318-9)

Leningrad

Shostakovich remained in Leningrad during first part of the war. He served in the fire brigade during the siege. A propaganda photograph shows a very uncomfortable Shostakovich in full uniform atop the roofs of Leningrad.



At that time Shostakovich composed his *Opus 60 Symphony No. 7 Leningrad*, which was performed in 1942 in the besieged city, with loudspeakers defiantly broadcasting the music to the Germans. The symphony illustrates how Shostakovich played with the meanings of his music. The opening movement of the Leningrad symphony provides an enthralling march that begins like the Pied Piper and ends as a “gargantuan, vulgar rant” (Ross, 2007, p. 247). The selection gives the middle of this transition:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovich-symphony-7-1-middle.mp3>

Initially we cannot help but be swept up by this militaristic *Bolero* even when we know it represents the German invasion. Emotions are fickle – they can give force to bad ideas as well as good. And music is the mother of emotion.

Volkov claimed that this movement was composed before the German invasion and that the music represented Stalin rather than Hitler, but Fay has pointed out that this may have been a misinterpretation, since the dates on the initial autograph versions of the score are clearly after the invasion (Fay, 2000, note 7, p 313).

Formalism

Despite the success of his wartime music, by 1948 Shostakovich had once again fallen into disrepute for his formalist tendencies. The criticism is hard to understand. Particularly in his symphonies, Shostakovich's music is easy to appreciate. His melodies are memorable and moving, his orchestration always exciting.

The criticism of formalism can be invoked against abstract painting, but it is difficult to apply to music. Music is formal by nature. Music can be composed programmatically, but the much of music's appeal is that it freely plays with the emotions independently of thought.

Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's second-in-command, singled out Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, and Khachaturyan as "the leading figures of the formalist trend in music, a trend which is fundamentally wrong." Soviet classical music should convert the songs of the people into classical forms:

Any listener will tell you that the works of Soviet composers of the formalist type differ fundamentally from classical music. Classical music is marked by its truthfulness and realism, its ability to blend brilliant artistic form with profound content, and to combine the highest technical achievement with simplicity and intelligibility. Formalism and crude naturalism are alien to classical music in general and to Russian classical music in particular. ...

The neglect of programme music is also a departure from progressive traditions. It is well known that Russian classical music was as a rule programme music. ...

Melodiousness is beginning to disappear. A passionate emphasis on rhythm at the expense of melody is characteristic of modern music. Yet we know that music can give pleasure only if it contains the essential elements in

a specific harmonic combination. (Zhdanov, 1948)

In his criticisms Zhdanov was harking back to the ideas that initially empowered 19th-Century Russian music. Revolutionary theories can be quite reactionary.

Shostakovich was dismissed from the Conservatory and required to repent his misdeeds before the General Assembly. He retreated into himself, and over the next few years composed mainly chamber music. Stalin did not listen to string quartets.

World Peace

However, as the most famous of the Soviet composers, Shostakovich was selected as a member of the Soviet delegation to the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in 1949 (Saunders, 2000). Shostakovich played a piano transcription of the second movement of his Symphony No 5 and read a speech written for him by the politicians. The conference was a free-for-all. Protesters, supported by the CIA, marched outside the hotel with signs demanding Shostakovich's defenestration:



At one of the conference sessions, Shostakovich was confronted by Nicolas Nabokov, a composer and first cousin of the novelist Vladimir. Though born in Russia, Nicolas had been an American citizen since 1939, and was at the time of the conference in the pay of the CIA. He publicly asked Shostakovich whether he agreed with a recent *Pravda* article denouncing Hindemith, Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Ashen-faced, Shostakovich murmured that he supported the *Pravda* statements. To do otherwise would have risked his life. For Nabokov not to have realized this was cruel. Nothing is as oblivious as righteousness.

Jewish Themes

Shostakovich composed music that mixed the emotions. He was therefore fascinated by Jewish music (Scheinberg, 1995). He was intrigued by how Jewish people built a cheerful melody on sad intonations: "Why does he sing a cheerful song? Because he is sad at heart" (Fay, 2000, p. 169). During and after the war, Shostakovich befriended the composer Moishe Vainberg (or Mieczysław Weinberg), a Jewish refugee from Poland. They enjoyed discussing each other's compositions, and learning each other's musical traditions

In last movement of his *Opus 67 Piano Trio No. 2* (1944), Shostakovich uses a Jewish theme:

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovich-trio-last-movement-jewish-themes.mp3>

Some have suggested that this trio commemorates the Holocaust (e.g. Dubinsky, 1989, pp 111-157). News of the concentration camps was becoming available at the time of the trio's composition. Some have interpreted the last movement of the trio as representing Jews being asked to dance before they were executed. Although this idea fits the music, the trio was not specifically written to honor the victims of Nazism, but as a requiem for Shostakovich's friend Ivan Sollertinsky.

Shostakovich directly considered the Holocaust in his *Opus 113 Symphony No. 13 Babi Yar* (1962). The symphony is a choral setting of poems by Yevgeny Yevtushenko written to commemorate the massacre of the Ukrainian Jews at Babi Yar. The poems and the symphony were discredited by the Soviet government for placing the sufferings of the Jewish people above that of the Russians. Mravinsky refused to conduct the symphony. Though Stalin was dead, Soviet Russia continued to suppress the arts.

Coda



Toward the end of his life, Shostakovich was bitter. The photograph on the left by Ida Kar shows Shostakovich in 1959. The anxiety is palpable. Shostakovich was angry about the way artists such as Akhmatova had been treated in Soviet Russia. He was depressed that he had not been free to compose as he wished. The bitterness comes out in Volkov's *Testimony*. Although much of the book comes from prior publications, some of it was indeed based on Volkov's interviews with the elderly

composer between 1971 and 1974.

Laurel Fay points out that

Soviet history was always a work-in-progress; people, ideas and facts that became unpalatable were routinely “airbrushed” out of existence in later Soviet sources. Only rarely was anything so erased later on restored. Shostakovich himself was obliged to reinvent his past on occasion. By the time successive generations encountered the “expurgated” pages of their history, they often had lost track of what had been excised, and why. (Fay, 2000, p. 5)

Perhaps only fiction can get at the truth. Julian Barnes’ *The Noise of Time*, a fictional retelling of Shostakovich’s life, is slated for publication early in 2016.

Shostakovich died of lung cancer in 1975. His last work was *Opus 147 Sonata for Viola and Piano*. The final movement of the sonata is similar in length to the last movement of Beethoven’s last sonata. However, where Beethoven is transcendent, Shostakovich is austere. The following clip gives the beginning of the last movement. The piano accompaniment makes allusion to Beethoven’s Moonlight sonata, but the violin theme is very Russian.

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/shostakovich-viol-a-dagio-first-4-minutes.mp3>

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