

Mythemes II

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As we saw in the previous essays, certain narratives resonate with people across cultures. Different folklore can even stem from the same historical interlude. It might be noted that the Legend of King Arthur and the Legend of Beowulf likely refer to the same place and time (England, c. 500), and possibly even the same figures. (The iconic character may have been based on the Briton king, Riothamus.)

Behold a coordinate in space-time in which “Eomer” was king. Eomer was the father of Icel, and thus the grandfather of Creoda, the first king of Mercia. (He was the son of Angeltheow and thus the grandson of Offa of Angel.) BOTH legends seem to be based on one of these kings—and may even conflate them. How is it that these two distinct stories—the legacies of which have almost nothing to do with each other—were oriented around (roughly) the same historical figure? Once we see how legends metastasize, and ramify, this uncanny coincidence turns out to be not so uncanny after all.

Interesting narrative parallels exist—notably, regarding the nemesis. Grendel’s mother—a creepy sorceress named Aglæc-wif / Aglæca—was from a mysterious place in a lake. Meanwhile, Mordred’s mother—a creepy sorceress named Morgan[na]—was from a mysterious place in a lake (the Isle of Apples, in Avalon). Such similarities should come as no more surprise to us than the similarities between the various Gospel accounts of Jesus of Nazareth: a Palestinian Jew from the early 1st century that became a deified figure for a newfangled Abrahamic religion.

Both the legend of King Arthur (made popular by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his “Historia Regum Britanniae” in the 1130’s, but based on much earlier oral traditions) and of Beowulf (c. 1000), were a synthesis of myth and history. In both cases, it is difficult to know where one begins and the other ends. Moreover, each was compiled centuries after the alleged events are said to have taken place—and was based on a long, meandering chain of oral transmission, the genesis of which has been lost in a dense, swirling fog of historical uncertainty.

(Interesting tidbit: A piece of Celtic mythology that was contemporaneous with Mohammed of Mecca was “Y Gododdin” from the “Book of Aneirin”, which dates back to the 7th century. The story—originally composed in Old Welsh—even contained references to King Arthur.)

Mythemes (narrative templates) typically revolve around archetypes (distinct concepts). The universal proclivity for idolatry is well-attested; and idolatry tends to gravitate toward archetypes that most resonate with our human nature. {1} Not coincidentally, those archetypes serve as the optimal vehicles for the promulgation of this or that ideology. This accounts for the allure of certain motifs in mythology. A prime example is the (authoritarian) Father-god in Abrahamic theology. {7} After all, masculinity is associated with strength and discipline. Another example of a near-universal theme is the mother goddess. (I do a survey of these in part three of my series on “The Empowerment Of Women”.)

Generally, a deity is posited to explain Creation (the existence of mankind, and of the universe itself). Outside of the singular, unrivaled male godhead (a monarch taken to cosmic proportions) and some kind of “Mother Earth”, there is a preponderance of two kinds of deification (read: archetypes): weather and sun. These seem to be the most prolific forms that godheads take.

It stands to reason that controlling the weather and/or the circadian cycle would be seen as the most fundamental of cosmic powers. (Why does it rain? Why does it NOT rain? Why is there day and night?)

~~Associating the godhead with the ultimate source of light (the sun) makes perfect sense as light is~~

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symbolic of both power and wisdom (thus: omnipotence and omniscience). Control over day and night, and of the elements, seems to be the most basic form of sovereignty.

It is worth surveying the various manifestations of each of these archetypes; as it illustrates how deities are conceived IN GENERAL. So let's address each in turn.

Gods of Thunder [alt. storm-gods] are ubiquitous, as this seems to be the most overt manifestation of power over the natural world. It makes sense that, due to our predisposition to anthropomorphize, we would be inclined to attribute intelligent control over an otherwise inexplicable universe.

Here, I focus on deities associated with thunder / lightning rather than just rain-gods, as thunder / lightning marries two key things: life-giving precipitation and a (loud, flashy) command over the elements. Ergo an all-encompassing nurturance in conjunction with an exhibition of prodigious power. Here are forty notable examples:

1. Indra (**Vedic; then Hindu**)
2. Set[h] (**Egyptian**)
3. Ishkur (**Sumerian**)
4. Enlil (**Akkadian / Assyrian**)
5. [h]Adad (**Amorite / Aramaean**)
6. Baal-Hadad / Baal-Zephon / Baal-Shamin (**Canaanite**)
7. Qos (**Edomite**)
8. Amm [alternately a moon-god] (**South Arabian**)
9. Athtar (**South Arabian**) {2}
10. Quzah [namely at Muzdalifah] (**Arabian**)
11. Tarhunna (**Hittite**)
12. Teshub (**Hurrian**)
13. Tarhunz[a] / Tarhuwant (**Luwian**)
14. Theispas (**Urartian / proto-Armenian**)
15. Gebeleizis (**Dacian**)
16. Zibelthiurdos (**Thracian**)
17. Zeus (**Greek**)
18. Aplu (**Etruscan**)
19. Jupiter (**Roman**)
20. Thor (**Norse**)
21. [t]Hora-galles; Tiermes / Turms; A[i]ljeke (**Saami**)
22. Ukko / Aija [derived from the Estonian "Uku"] (**Finnish**)
23. Taara[pita] / Tooru (**Estonian**)
24. Perkunas (**Baltic**)
25. Perun (**Slavic**)
26. Gebeleizis (**Gothic**)
27. Taranis (**Celtic**)
28. Perendi (**Albanian**)
29. Huracan [basis for the Carib / Kalina and K'iche moniker]; K'awiil; Yopaat; Tlaloc; Chaahk (**Mayan**)
30. Apocatequil (**Incan**)
31. Xolotl (**Aztec**)
32. Guabancex (**meso-American**)
33. Amadiohia (**Igbo**)
34. Oya (**Yaruba**)

35. Wele (**Bantu**)
36. Mamaragan (**Australian Aboriginal**)
37. Kane; Haikili (**Polynesian; Hawaiian**)
38. Lei Shen (**Taoist Chinese**)
39. Lei-Gog and Tian-mu [god of thunder and goddess of lightning] (**Chinese**)
40. Susa-no-O[-no-Mikoto] (**Shinto Japanese**)

More than just the weather (a terrestrial matter), celestial phenomena are features of the natural world begging for explanation. Unsurprisingly, then, sometimes the sun-god and storm-god are one in the same—as with the K'iche deity, “To'xil”.

The quintessential case-study of mythemic recycling is the Great Flood story. The punitive deluge narrative's earliest incarnation was found in Sumerian tales about the god-head “Enki” and the hero, “Zi-ud-sudra” of Shuruppak (Hellenized to “Xisuthros”; Anglicized to “Ziusudra”) c. 2900 B.C. The tale was then modified in the epic poems about King “Bilgamesh” of Uruk (where the hero was named “Ut[a]-napishti[m]”) in the late 3rd millennium B.C. We now refer to the consolidation of these poems as the “Epic of Gilgamesh”, the earliest manuscript of which (designated by the incipit, “Shutur eli Sharri”) is from the 18th century B.C. This involved a revelation (from the god, Enki) in which the hero was to construct a massive boat (the “Preservers of Life”), which would save him (and his closest kin, plus a sampling of the beasts of the field, grains and seeds) from the impending deluge. A white dove was sent out to find land at the end of the tribulation, finally returning when the Flood began to subside. The great boat found harbor on Mount [“Kur”] Nisir (in Kurdistan). Ring any bells?

Unsurprisingly, by the 18th century B.C., the story had been modified again—this time in the (Akkadian) hagiographies about King Atra-Hasis of Shuruppak, as recounted in the “Enuma Elish”.

Atra-Hasis was far from the end of this chain of appropriation. Later, Indians adopted their own version of the tale. The “Deluge of Manu” is from the Vedic “Shatapatha Brahmana” of the 8th century B.C. (later found in the “Matsya Purana”); though the legend purportedly dates back to c. 1500 B.C. Vishnu instructs the Dravidian king, Manu (likely corresponding with King Shraddha-deva; a.k.a. “Satyavrata”) to build a giant boat to save himself and his kin (the sapta-rishi; alt. all mankind) from a global alluvion. {19} In Buddhist lore, the tale of Manu and the flood was then adapted for the Maha-bharat[a]. Also note that the legend includes a Creation myth about the world being created from the darkness (alt. the primordial waters: “Narah”) by the godhead: the divine self-existent referred to as “Svayambhu”.

Starting in the 6th century B.C., the Hebrews (exiled in Babylon) would recycle the tale YET AGAIN in the first of the five Books of Moses: “Genesis”, in which the hero was re-named “Noah”. (The authors of the Koran would then rename him “Nuh”.) The key in this version was to ensure that all non-humans were preserved; thus accommodating everything from storks and hippopotamuses (as well as Noah's immediate kin) on the fabled vessel. For the Creator of the Universe sought to wipe out not only (almost) all homo sapiens, but (almost) every lemur, leopard, elk, and elephant as well. {20}

The Ancient Greeks also got in on the action with the tale of the Ogygian Flood (where the hero was named “Ogyges”). Most notably, in the early 4th century B.C., Plato composed his own version of the tale (featured in both the “Timaeus” and “Critias”) wherein Prometheus' son, Deucalion, was given the lead role. Predictably, Plato based his version on antecedent legends about King Ogyges of Boeotia / Attica / Lycia. Other Greeks made Dardanus (son of Zeus) the protagonist. (Why? Well, hey, why not?) Later adaptations include Lucian of Samosata's 2nd-century work, “De Dea Syria”...in which the hero is re-named “Sisythus”.

The tale was a big hit in ancient Rome as well. In his Metamorphosis (c. 8 A.D.), Ovid adopted Plato's moniker for the story's hero (“Deucalion”). After having created humans, things went awry, as mankind

falls into moral depravity. Ovid explains that the godhead looks down on this infelicitous development in despair, and says: “I must destroy the race of men”; and then proceeds to flood the world, leaving only a single man and his wife to survive.

Meanwhile, a later Jewish sect adopted YET ANOTHER version of the story in their tale of “Enoch’s Watchers”.

We also encounter the theme in the Far East. The legend in Chinese folklore was probably unrelated to the legend that propagated in the West. (It didn’t involve the complete eradication of mankind; and it didn’t envelop the entire planet.) In the late 2nd century B.C., Sima Qian recounted the tale of “Gun-Yu” (the “Great Flood”), which purportedly occurred during the late 24th / early 23rd century B.C. The tale had already been mentioned in Wang Jia’s “Shi Yi Ji” (c. 400 B.C.) and in the “Shan-Hai Ching” (“Classic of the Mountains & Seas”; 4th century B.C.)...though it probably came from oral history from far before that. The theme was also used in lore about Xia King Yu.

Meanwhile, in ancient Korea, the legend of a Great Flood featured the hero, Namu Doryeong (interestingly similar to the Vedic “Manu”). And the ancient (Temuan) Malay told of “Mamak” and “Inak Bungbuk”, who escaped an alluvion sent by the godhead as punishment for their ancestors’ misdeeds. Myriad flood myths would later emerge in other parts of the world—such as the Norse myth of “Bergelmir”, the Irish myth of “Dwyvan” and “Dwyvach”, the Incan myth about “Viracocha”, the Aztec myth about “Teocipactli”, and the Filipino myth of “Hinilawod”. {21}

Wonder if all of these were simply cribbed from one another? Think again. Similar flood stories can be found in Mayan and aboriginal Australian lore. Indeed, the Mayan “K’iche” sacred history (the “Popol Vuh”) has a flood myth. The theme is so ubiquitous that it qualifies as a mytheme. We can only conclude that there is a universal penchant for this allegorical leitmotif.

Finally, the authors of the Koran would recycle the Judaic flood story. Keeping with the Abrahamic tradition, they named the protagonist “Nuh”: an Arabized version of the Syriac version (“Nukh”) of the Ancient Hebrew name (“Noah”). {22}

It is safe to assume that no mention of “Ziusudra”, “Utnapishtim”, or “Atra-Hasis” is forthcoming in Islamic lore (though sometimes the last is referred to as “Hasis-atra” in Arabic). For mytheme-propagation rarely involves proper attribution, as each story-teller likes to fashion the version he espouses as the ORIGINAL version (how the story has ALWAYS been told). This phenomenon is commonplace. As Jonathan Swift once noted, “Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it.” (For the phenomenon of mytheme-milking, see Appendix 2.)

The incidence of this monumental story across so many cultures, across so much time and space, indicates that there is a strong appeal to the notion of an existential re-set. Everywhere, a global flood is a matter of WASHING AWAY, and starting anew...taken to its extreme.

The narrative template (that is: of a global cleansing) has been recycled over and over; and we can see why. As with other mythemes, this tale has universal appeal: a purging of iniquity, executed by the impresario of the natural world. To what end? Well, ostensibly, to make the world a better place. (Of course, contained within the tale is a threat: “See what happens when you displease the god[s]? Let that serve as a warning!”)

Sun-gods:

Controlling night and day, it would seem, is a clear manifestation of cosmic sovereignty. This also makes sense because Sol is the giver of heat and light—and therefore represents a life-giving force.

Moreover, the sun is the brightest celestial body, and its diurnal procession augurs both power and natural

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order (read: authority and inevitability)—an idea captured in the Vedic conception of “Rta”.

And so it goes: worship of the sun serves important psychical purposes. Having something so accountable confers a sense of ORDER in an otherwise bewildering universe—a guarantee that things will kinda-sorta continue to kinda-sorta make sense. This is something we all covet.

Even better, the positing of diurnal procession as the quintessence of divinity proffers a sense of structure to an otherwise chaotic-seeming world...in which unpredictable things happen and tribulations (wars, injustices, draughts, monsoons, infestations, diseases) occur inexplicably. Indeed, in a world that is so dismayingly unreliable, it is nice to have something that one can rely on NO MATTER WHAT. (What good is a deity who is not dependable?)

To top it all off, light is the optimal semiotic for wisdom, as wisdom is universally understood to be a kind of illumination (hence the Greek titan, Hyperion). This is often a matter being shown THE WAY—as by a beacon. Hence the common idiom of “enlightenment” across the globe—from secular Europe to the Far East. The ethos of SAGACITY is facilitated by that which provides the world with its light. {3}

Indeed, there is something to be said for the ultimate source of light—especially if one is seeking to grow crops for sustenance. It is no wonder that there has often been an affiliation between deities of weather, of sunlight, of a mother-Earth, and of agriculture / fertility. Even the Egyptian mother-goddess, Isis, was typically associated with light. The sun invariably plays a key role in every possible cosmological theory. After all, light is associate with good things—notably: sight, fecundity, and vitality. {5}

[Amun-]Ra was not an anomaly. Fascination with the sun can be found in Semitic lore, as with “Shamshi-El” [Aramaic for “Sun of God”], likely based on the Sumerian sun-god, Shamash...rendered “Shamshu” in Assyrian...then rendered “Shapshu” by the Babylonians...then rendered “Shapash” by the Canaanites. This was likely the basis for the Judaic arch-angel, Shamshi-El (guardian of the Garden of Eden according to the Kabbalah).

In the 3rd century, Roman Emperor Aurelian fashioned “Sol Invictus” as the godhead—a conception embraced by Constantine even after he “converted” to Christianity. (Note: the birthday celebration of Sol Invictus was December 25, a date that might sound familiar.) Here are fifty more preeminent solar deities around the world (some of whom are goddesses):

1. Mitra (**Vedic**)
2. Surya; Savit[a]r (as an Aditya); Aditi; Bhanu; Ravi; Vivasvan[a] (**Hindu**)
3. Ninurta; Utu (**Sumerian**)
4. Eri (**Akkadian**)
5. Shamshu / Shapshu (**Assyrian / Babylonian**)
6. Yarhibol (**Aramean**)
7. Ilah hag-Gabal [Latinized: “Ela-gabalus”] (**Syrio-Roman**)
8. Malak-bel (**Palmyrene / Nabataean**)
9. Nahundi (**Elamite**)
10. Mitra [adapted from the antecedent Vedic]; Hvare-Khshaeta (**Persian**)
11. Malak-Baal [“messenger of Baal”; often rendered “Malakbel”] (**Syrian**)
12. Mandulis [based on Horus] (**Nubian**)
13. Shams / Shamash (**South Arabian / Sabaean / Himyarite**) {6}
14. Nuha (**North Arabian**)
15. Shapash / Shamesh [daughter of El; likely based on the Assyrian “Shapshu”] (**Canaanite**)
16. Shivini (**Urtian / proto-Armenian**)

17. Usil (**Etruscan**)
18. Helios (**Greek**)
19. Istanu; Wurus[h]emu [alt. Utu Arinna; Arinniti] (**Hurrian**)
20. Uru [Kassite: Urus]; Mithras [adapted from the antecedent Vedic] (**Hittite**)
21. Aramazd (**Armenian**)
22. Hars (**Scythian / Sarmatian**)
23. Koyash, son of the godhead [the sky-god, Tengri] (**Turko-Mongolic**)
24. Gun Ana (**Kyrgyz / Kazakh**)
25. Dazhbog (**Slavic**)
26. Saule (**Baltic**)
27. Sol (**Nordic**)
28. Sunna (**Norse / Germanic**)
29. Lugh; Etain (**Celtic**)
30. Ekhi (**Basque**)
31. Belenus (**Gaulish**)
32. Zoor [alt. “Zun”; of the Zunbil Faith of the Hindu Kush] (**Pashtun**)
33. Xihe; Taiyang Shen (**Chinese**)
34. Hae-nim (**Korean**)
35. Tonatiuh; Nanauatzin (**Aztec**)
36. “Kon-Tiki” Viracocha [original godhead]; then his son, Inti (**Incan**)
37. Kinich Ahau (**Yucatec Mayan**)
38. Tohil (**K’iche Mayan**)
39. Gurzil (**Libyan Berber**)
40. Magec (**Guanche Berber**)
41. Liza (**Fon; West African**)
42. Ngai; Enkai (**Maasai, Kamba, and Kukuyu; East African**)
43. Anyanwu (**Igbo**)
44. Chiuta (**Tumbuka**)
45. Akycha; Malina (**Inuit**)
46. Wi (**Lakota**)
47. Tsohanoai (**Navajo**)
48. Maui Tiki-tiki (**Polynesian**)
49. Wuriupranili (**Australian aboriginal**)
50. Tama-nui-te-ra (**Maori**)

The Khitans—including the (Sakyamuni) Liao dynasty—worshipped the sun as well.

And what of the perpetual renewal of the diurnal cycle? Daily sunrise is the ultimate symbol of re-birth / re-awakening. It is a reassurance that the natural order will continue apace. Solar deification is the quintessence of ironclad constancy. Indeed, even if we can count on nothing else, we can ALWAYS count on the next dawn.

It is no surprise, then, that the most important god of the Egyptian pantheon was [Amun-]Ra; who was LITERALLY re-born each morning. (Another key god, Horus, was also associated with the sun.) Also note the use of goddesses to represent sunrise (dawn)—as with the Vedic “Ushas”, the Shinto “Ame-no-Uzume-no-mikoto”, the Ugaritic “Shahar”, the Greek “Eos”, the Etruscan “Thesan”, and the Roman “Aurora”.

ANNUAL re-birth is also salient. Hence the feminine embodiment of spring-tide (and the concomitant celebration of the vernal equinox) has occurred across the globe. In Hindu lore, tribute is paid to the goddess of creativity, Saraswati, on “Vasant Panchami”. In the Occident, we find:

- Ceres and Flora **in Roman lore**
- Baba Dochia of Dacia **in Romanian lore**
- Baba Marta **in Bulgarian lore**
- Ostara **in Anglo-Saxon lore**
- Austria-henae **in Celtic lore**
- Frau Holle (a.k.a. “Mother Hulda”) **in Germanic lore**
- the May Queen **in English lore**

All were women. Each represented the advent of spring—a re-birth that was (naturally) associated with femininity (i.e. fertility). The significance of this particular idiom has been reflected since the days that Stonehenge was erected. It should come as no surprise that EVERYONE assumes the vernal equinox to be cosmically significant. For the re-ascension from the perspective of those in the Earth’s northern hemisphere symbolizes revitalization. Consequently, it has been incorporated into many spiritual traditions.

The ancient Anglo-Saxons celebrated the goddess of rebirth, “[e]Ostara”. That was later coopted by Christians—rendered “Easter” as a way to commemorate the resurrection of their savior. The same motif is encountered in the Far East. The Sanskrit term for astrological passage, “sankranti” is the basis for the Hindu celebration of the initiation of spring: “Makar Sankranti” (Tamil: “Thai Pongal”)...from which the Siamese celebration of “Songkran” is derived. The Romans celebrated Ambarvalia. The ancient Celts celebrated Bealtaine. The Romanians celebrated Martisor. To this day, Sikhs celebrate “Vaisakhi”. The Zoroastrian festival of “Nowruz”, celebrating the onset of spring, predates the Achaemenid Empire. {23}

NONE of this was anything new. The commemoration of the vernal equinox as a new beginning goes back to the Sumerian / Assyrian festival of “Akitu[m]”.

The list is long of archetypes that crop up again and again around the world. Suffice to say: When it comes to deification, there are universal tendencies. Of course, each mythic system fashions itself as sui generis. In reality, it is merely operating from the same template as any other in the world, throughout history. This is unsurprising, as each template reflects an aspect of human nature...modified to accommodate the exigencies of the time and place.

As we’ll see below, those attempting to reconcile Abrahamic monotheism with (Pauline) Christian Trinitarianism were willing to undergo taxonomic acrobatics so as to maintain a veneer of credence to their brand of theism. This is a reminder that dogmatists are often obliged to engage in semiotic backflips in their attempt to keep cognitive dissonance at bay.

TRINITIES:

It is no secret that the significance of THREE is ubiquitous in theology / mythology. Buddhists exalt the “trikaya” (three aspects of the buddha, sometimes referred to as the three refuges; alt. three jewels): Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Sarvastivada Buddhists posit the three “yanas” [vehicles; paths]: Sravaka-yana, Pratyeka-Buddha-yana, and Bodhi-sattva-yana. Jains posit three ways to Enlightenment (samyag-darsana, samyag-jnana, and samyag-caritra) as do Buddhists (Vajrayana, Sravakayana / Hinayana, and Mahayana). Taoists pay tribute to the “Sanqing” (“Three Pure Ones”; alt. the three treasures); though the Tao itself is not worshipped (as it is not a deity). Zoroastrianism posits three virtues: Humata (good thoughts), Hukhta

(good words), and Huvarshta (good deeds).

The earliest instance of tripartite deification was the Sumerian / Assyrian triad of a solar deity, a lunar deity (typically represented by a crescent), and a deity associated with Venus (the evening star). The sun god was Utu / Shamash, patron deity of Sippar and Larsa; who was associated with Truth and Justice. (The Hurrian version was “Shimigi”. The Semitic version was “Lugal-banda”, who was thought of as “the Shepherd”.) The moon god was Nanna / Sin, patron deity of Harran and Ur; and came to be associated with Hubal, moon god of the Nabataeans and other pre-Islamic Arab peoples. The goddess associated with Venus was Inanna / Ishtar, who was the patron deity of several major cities—notably: Uruk, Akkad, Ninevah, Nippur, Lagash, Shuruppak, and Zabala[m].

This triad was attested as far back as the 21st century B.C. on the Stele of Ur-Nammu. It also occurred on the Kudurru of Meli Shipak [“son of the moon god”] from the 12th century B.C. The Babylonians honored the triad in the 6th century B.C.—as attested on the Kudurru of Nabu-kudurri-ushur II [“first-born guardian of Nabu”; “Nebuchadnezzar”] and the Stele of Nabu-na’id [“Nabonidus”].

The motif of a triune godhead also goes back to Egypt in the 14th century B.C. Pharaoh Amun-hotep IV (a.k.a. “Akhen-Aten”) fashioned himself as part of a holy trinity: with his queen, Nefertiti, and the sun-god, Aten. (Aten was conceived in a quasi-monotheistic / heno-theistic manner.) Insofar as the sun was worshipped as “Ra”, he was worshipped as a tripartite godhead: Kheper (dawn), Re-Horakhty (noon), and Atum (dusk). Insofar as veneration of the Nile River went, there was an Elephantine triad of Khnum, Satet, and Anuket.

The Greeks posited the divine troika of the “Moirae” (the Fates; later rendered the “Parcae” by the Romans): Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. They also posited three “Charites” (the Graces; later rendered the “Gratiae” by the Romans): Aglaea / Phaenna, Euphrosyne / Euthymia, and Thalia / Clela. (The Athenians named them Hegemone, Auxo, and Peitho.) The Delians worshipped the divine triad: Leto, Artemis, and Apollo. In Eleusinian Mystery cults, the divine triad of Demeter, Persephone, and Triptolemus was worshipped. Later, the Romans incorporated this triad in the cult of Proserpina.

The Romans had two divine troikas, depending on which caste one belonged to: the Aventine triad (Ceres, Liber, and Libera) was for the plebeians; while the Capitoline triad (Juventas, Minerva, and Juno) was for the patricians.

There have been many instances of tripartite conceptions of divinity throughout history. Here are more from the (pre-Christian) ancient world:

- **Sumerians** (esp. in Nippur) worshipped a triad of father, mother, and son: Enlil, Ninlil, and Ninurta [alt. Enlil, An(u), and Ea]. The Akkadians worshipped Shamash (the sun), Sin (the moon), and Ishtar (the analogue of Venus) [derived from the Sumerian Utu, Nanna, and Innana respectively].
- In **Babylonian** cosmology, a triad of beings gave rise to the gods: Apsu, Tiamat, and Mummu. {18} The Babylonians also worshipped the divine troika: Nimrod (father; the sun), Semiramis (mother; the moon), and Dumuzid [a.k.a. “Tammuz”] (the anointed son; the shepherd). {9}
- **Canaanites** worshipped an Assyrian-influenced triad of deities: Shahiru, Baal-Shamin, and Ishtar. This was also rendered the divine troika: Tammuz, Baal, and Ashtoreth. The Hellenic formulation—influenced by Egyptian mythology—was the triple goddess worship of Qetesh, Anat, and Astarte. {2}
- **Aramaeans** worshipped the Mesopotamian godhead, Baal, in terms of a divine troika: Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol.
- **Elamites** worshipped a divine troika: Humban, Kir[ir]isha [alt. “Kirrisi”; “Pinikir”], and Inshushinak.

- **Urantians** (proto-Armenians) worshipped the patron-gods of the cities, Ardini[s] (the godhead, [k]Haldi), Kumenu (the storm /thunder-god, Theispas), and of Tushpa (the sun-god, Shivini).
- **Egyptians** worshipped the divine troika: Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Those in Memphis worshipped the triad: Ptah (father), Sekhmet (mother), and Nefertum (son). Those in Waset [Thebes] worshipped the triad: Amun (father), Mut (mother), and Khonsu (son).
- The **Sabaeans / Hadhrami** of southern Arabia (primarily at Qataban) worshipped a divine troika that seems to have been based on Semitic precursors: the moon-god, Amm; his consort, Athirat / Asherah (correlated with the Canaanite mother-goddess, As[h]toreth); and Yam. {2}
- **Zoroastrians** worship Ahura Mazda trilaterally—in terms of the three Great Fires: Adur Burzen-Mihr [Burzin-Mitro], Adur Gushnasp, and Adur Farnbag. Also, there are three divinities “yazatas” that pass judgement: “Mithra” [Covenant], “Rashnu” [Justice], and “Sraosha” [Obedience].
- **Armenians** worshipped the divine troika: Vahagn [Vishapakagh], Aramazd, and Anahit.
- **Etruscans** worshipped the divine troika: Mother (Uni), Father (Tinia), and Daughter (Menrva).
- **Greco-Roman Stoics** posited a tripartite conception of the divine: the godhead or demiurge (“nous”; the Mind), the word (“logos”; the ordering principle of the cosmos), and the breath-of-life (“pneuma”; which permeates all things and serves as the animating life-force)—all as aspects of one thing.
- The **Norse** (Vikings) worshipped the three sons of Borr: Odin, Vili, and Ve.
- **Ancient Celtic** peoples worshipped the tripartite mother-goddess, “Brigid”: poetess, smith, and healer.
- **Ancient Slavic** peoples worshipped the “Triglav”: Dazhbog [later, “Veles”], Svarog, and Perun [Rugian: “Sventovit”].
- **Hindus** worship the “Trimurti”, the tripartite manifestation of Ishvar[a]: Brahma as the creator, concomitant with Vishnu and Shiv[a]. {10}

The phenomenon is global. Here are more examples from different parts of the world:

- **In the Nordic regions:** Saami (“Laplander”) myth posited a divine troika: T[h]iermes / Thoron, Storjunkare, and Baivre / Jumala.
- **In Europe:** Ancient Prussian myth posited a divine troika: Perkunas (the celestial creative force), Patrimpas (the earthly creative force), and Velnias / Patulas (the destructive forces of nature). In Baltic (esp. Lithuanian) paganism, centered around “Romuva”, these corresponded to the gods of thunder (Perkunas), spring (Patrimpas), and the underworld (Patulas).
- **In the Middle East:** The Syriac “Hawran” worshipped a trinity, one of which was a god-man. Meanwhile, the Yazidi trinity is Tawuse Melek (the godhead), Sheikh Adi, and Sultan Ezid.
- **In East Asia:** Shinto (Japanese) myth posited the “Zoka Sanshin” [three kami of creation], the godhead of which was the uncreated “Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi[-no-Kami]” (the Heavenly omni-Father, and Creator of the Universe). Later myth posited the divine troika of Amaterasu (sun-goddess), Tsukuyomi (moon-god), and Susa-no-O (storm-god)—all proceeding from the godhead, Izanagi-no-Mikoto [alt. “Izanagi-no-Okami”]. In Korea, there is the “Haneullim” triad: “Hwanin” (the Creator), “Hwanung” (the teacher), and “Hanbaegom” (the ruler; associated with the mythic king Dangun). And in Tibet, Bön posits a trinity with the sky-god, King Pehar; his consort, Düza Minkar; as well as a human incarnation (sometimes associated with the fabled yidam, “Tapihritsa”).
- **In Africa:** Bantu and Yoruba / Igbo myth (spec. in the Ifa Faith) posited three aspects of the one triune god: Olodumare, Olorun, and Olofi. In South America, the Candomble and Umbanda (a syncretism of Roman Catholicism with their African antecedent) pay tribute to this same trinity.
- **In Meso-America:** Aztecs posited a divine troika: Quetzalcoatl, Nahuatl, and Tlaloc.
- **In the South Pacific:** Polynesians posited a divine troika: Kane [alt. Kanaloa], Lono, and Ku.

Even **in pre-Islamic Arabia**, there existed a tendency to deify in trinitarian terms:

- Bedouins of northern Arabia (e.g. the Kedarites and the Lakhmids) worshipped a divine troika that seems to have been inspired by the Assyrians: the sun-goddess, Nuha; the moon-god, Ruda; and the godhead, Atar-shama[y]in.
- Other Bedouins of northern Arabia, namely in Tema [now “Tayma”], worshipped a divine troika: Salm [of Mahram], Shingala, and Asherah (who was based the Ugaritic / Phoenician goddess).
- Bedouins of southern Arabia worshipped a divine troika: the sun-god, Yam; the moon-god, Wadd [alt. Sin; Nanna]; and the goddess, Astarte (who was also based on the Ugaritic / Phoenician goddess).
- Also popular throughout the Levant and Hijaz (e.g the Tanukhids) was the Nabataean troika: Al-Uzza, Allat, and Man[aw]at (derided in the Koran).

All of these peoples would have spoken Syriac.

It is difficult to say whether any of one of these triads is best described as tri-theism or as a divine trinity consummate with monotheism. (In the latter case, each moniker would simply refer to an aspect of the divine unity.)

We even find triads in Judaic mysticism. Kabbalists posit ten “sephirot” (each an emanation [“shefa”] of “[Ohr] Ayn Sof”) in the Tree of Life. These ten proceed from the primary three: Ket[h]er, Binah, and [K]hokmah—which represent the divine will (neuter), intuitive understanding (feminine), and wisdom (masculine).

The most well-known triune god-head is that of Nicene Christianity, which posits a trinitarian version of the Abrahamic deity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (per Matthew 28:19). This represents the heavenly godhead, the Messiah [Greek: “Kristos”], and the divine spirit that pervades all things. Once again, the idea is that a single entity can have several different aspects; but this was NOT the original version of the Christian trinity.

Originally, it was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Breath. In the earliest Koine Greek version of the Gospel according to Matthew (which invoked the triad for baptism in 28:19), “patros” was used to mean *figurehead* and “uiou” was used to mean *progeny*. Later, “agiou pneumatos” was rendered “holy spirit” (in the Vulgate edition, as the Greek “pneumatōs” translated into the Latin “spiritus”). But here’s the thing: The exhortation in this passage (to go out and baptize all nations) was a rhetorical flourish, not a description of Reality. That is: The locution was liturgical in nature.

We might also note that The Word (“logos”) was equated with The Son. The Word was interpreted as “the Word-made-flesh”; as Jesus of Nazareth was taken to be the corporeal embodiment of The Word. It was idiom on top of idiom. Combine this with the conflation of PROGENY (“uiou” in Greek) with SON, and the reification is complete.

This sacralized triad was conceptualized in the first letter of John (5:7-8) ORIGINALLY as “the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood” (“For there are three that testify”; ref. the codex Vaticanus from the 4th century). This wording is corroborated in citations made by Clement of Alexandria. Thus the “Patros” [“Father”], the “Logos” [“Word”], and the “agiou pneumatos” in the statement: “For there are three recorded in heaven.”

It was not until later that the triad was altered, rendered “Father, Progeny / Son, and Holy Spirit”. This emendation is referred to as the “Johannine Comma”. In BOTH cases, we are dealing with an idiomatic expression.

In other words: The tripartite conceptualization was more a turn of phrase than it was a literal description.

Notably: The codex Vaticanus is the oldest copy of the New Testament available. Tellingly, it does not have anything past verse 8 in the last chapter of Mark; as Mark 16:9-20 was not added until c. 400. Thus: There was no resurrection in the original version of the Syncretic Gospels.

The only passage that explicitly refers to a triune conception of the divine occurs in chapter 5 in the first letter of John, verses 7-8 (the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; who, it says, “bear witness in heaven”).

The problem, though, is that this “Johannine comma” (which states that “these three are one”) was not added until the Latin Vulgate renderings of the New Testament at the end of the 4th century. It did NOT exist in the earliest (Koine Greek) renderings. The Dutch theologian, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam noticed this discrepancy at the beginning of the 16th century...to the consternation of church authorities. As is often the case, the attempted cover-up is what most exposes the crime. After all, if the matter were already clear, then why did unscrupulous scribes find the need to insert this (contrived) passage into the text? Clearly, they recognized that the original text did not support the Trinitarian doctrine favored by the Catholic Church; so took measures to fudge the record.

We might also note that the earliest Abrahamic theology was not monotheistic; it was henotheistic (an example of monolatry, whereby one deity was seen as preeminent amongst all others). The famous Mosaic commandment does NOT assert that “I am the only god” or “there is no other god”; it merely demands that people refrain from “worshipping other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6). Meanwhile, Exodus 23:13 does not say that other god’s don’t EXIST; just that Yahweh doesn’t want anyone recognizing them.

(Ancillary Note: Abrahamic theology was not the first monotheism. Zoroastrianism had Ahura Mazda before the Exilic period; Vedic theology had Vishvakarma[n] / Brahma[n] before that; and Egypt had Akhenaten’s Ra-worship even before that. To this day, in Hinduism, Bhag(a)van represents the abstract concept of a universal god.)

There are various ways to rationalize the Messiah as son-of-god whilst retaining the claim of monotheism. One way to reconcile the apparent disjunction is to simply reject the conventional trinitarian model, and view the Father-Son dichotomy as two MODES (of perception) of a single (ontological) entity. Such modalism (a.k.a. “patri-passion-ism”) was propounded first by the Montanists in Late Antiquity, then by the Cathars in medieval Europe. It was first codified by Libyan theologian, Sabellius in the early 3rd century (hence the moniker at the time, “Sabellianism”).

Mia-physit-ism (a.k.a. “heno-physit-ism”; found in Syriac Christian theology) contends that there is a divine nature and human nature united as a compound nature (“physis”) in the PERSON of Yeshua ben Yusef of Nazareth (JoN), a Palestinian Jew from the Galilee. A popular form of this was Eutychian-ism (named after the 4th-century theologian, Eutyches of Constantinople).

To resolve the apparent paradox involved the Trinitarian view, proponents of “Arianism” suggested that “the Christ” was subordinate to “the Father”. Proponents of “Docetism” solved the ontological snafu by simply claiming JoN to have been an apparition—as attested in the Gospels Judas, Phillip, and Peter.

The monophysites (esp. those adhering to the Chalcedonian creed, as found in the Coptic and some Western Syriac traditions) subscribe to the unity of nature of Christ (mono-physis / mia-physis). Thus mono-physitism / mia-physitism is a way to rationalize the trinity via the supposition that there are

three “persons” yet one NATURE (a shared “physis”).

Others rationalized the trinity via homo-ousion: the contention that there are three “persons” yet one SUBSTANCE. Such “con-substantiality” (homo-ousios) of the Father and the Son exists in the midst of three distinct “persons” (hypo-stasis). This is more in keeping with “dyo-physis”, whereby it is contended that JoN had two natures / wills: human and divine. The Nestorians subscribed to dyo-physitism; an Eastern Syriac doctrine that caught on further east—beyond the frontiers of imperial control.

Still others adopted a compromise: two ASPECTS to his nature (the “Chalcedonian” verdict, adopted by most mainstream Christians). In any case, the idea is to posit different MANIFESTATIONS of a singular THING.

The Trinitarian doctrine as it came to exist under the Nicene Creed was an invention that post-dated the earliest following of JoN by many generations. Notably, in the mid-2nd century, Theophilus of Antioch referred to the “trias” as dios, logos [the word], and sophia [wisdom]. This was the doctrine of choice for the imperial powers, and operated under the aegis of the Melkites. Clement of Alexandria then seems to have articulated the triune conception of the divine c. 200.

Amongst the evidence that the trinitarian ideation of a later invention, the most incriminating is the insertion of a clause in the first letter of John (5:7-8) in the late 4th century: now referred to as the “Johannine comma”. The clause reads: “There are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one”...which was inserted prior to the line reading, “There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood; and these three agree in one.”

The clause did not exist in earlier translations of the earliest Koine Greek manuscripts (e.g. the Codex Sinaiticus from the mid-4th century), which were primarily rendered in Aramaic and Syriac. It did not even appear in the earliest Vulgate Bibles (the Codex Fuldensis from the mid-6th century). The oldest codices to include the clause are the Codex Frisingensis and the Codex Legionensis a century later. It seems that Frankish King Charlemagne, effectively the first Holy Roman Emperor, was most responsible for the success of the Johannine comma. In his Trinitarian ardor, he championed its inclusion in the official version of scripture.

Tellingly, the notorious clause was NOT included in Desiderius Erasmus’ first edition of the “Novum Instrumentum Omne” (the first printed version of the Greek New Testament) c. 1516; yet it WAS included three years later, in the 2nd edition. As it happens, this clause (in the first letter of John) is the closest one gets to any mention of “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost” in the New Testament.

To reiterate: Pace the Johannine comma, the Trinitarian model is not explicitly delineated in the New Testament.

The first EXPLICIT instantiation of the Trinitarian ideation was in the 3rd century, by the Berber theologian, Tertullian of Carthage. Here, the divine was conceptualized as “treis hypostases, homo-ousios” [Greek for “three persons, one substance”; alt. “tres personae, una substantia” in Latin]. Yet Tertullian was a Montanist, a sect founded by the 2nd-century Phrygian prophet, Montanus (who seems to have had a background in the Cybelene cult; and who was himself inspired by a mystic known as Quadratus of Athens). In a twist of irony, acolytes of Tertullian would eventually be rebuked by the Roman Catholic Church. (Amongst other heresies, the Montanists believed the New Jerusalem to be in Phrygia.)

The New Testament makes sense of the Father (as the Judaic godhead, Yahweh / Jehovah), the Son (as the human incarnation: the Christos), and Holy Spirit (as the divine essence that permeates human existence) in terms of different relationships. {11} Hence the wording in the New Testament: “unto” / “of” / “from” the Father; “by” / “through” the Son; and “in” / “with” the Holy Spirit. We look to the godhead; we are

redeemed / saved via the Messiah / Christos; and we are infused with the Holy Spirit. Thus Each facet of the triune deity plays a role in the trinitarian theology. {12}

In perhaps the most cited verse of the New Testament (the Gospel according to “John”, 3:16), it is stated that god sent his only begotten son, the belief in whom secures eternal life. The statement in John 14:6 that “nobody comes to the Father except through me” is plainly idiomatic—in keeping with similar declarations made by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita several centuries earlier. When JoN is reputed to have said: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”, he was being idiomatic in the same way that Lao Tzu was when saying the same thing several centuries earlier.

Later, others would make use of this idiomatic expression—as when the Persian mystic, Mansur-i Hallaj of Fars proclaimed “I am the Truth” c. 900 A.D. Thus, for any scriptural account, it is appropriate to read the statement idiomatically—as: “My teachings show—and thus I represent—the Way / the Truth / the Light / Life.” {13}

It might be noted that JoN never explicitly claimed himself to be divine. In the Gospel of John, he refers to the godhead as “my father”—as in “what my Father has given me is greater than all else; and nobody can seize it from the Father’s hand” (10:29) and “my Father is greater than I” (14:28). Jesus then elaborates on this point by invoking an overtly Buddhist idiom: “The Father and I are one” (10:30). This is clearly intended as an idiomatic expression—in the sense of one’s “atman” (soul) being one with “Brahman” (the divine that pervades all existence). This meaning is also articulated in 10:38 and 14:10/20 wherein Jesus states that “the Father is in me and I am in the Father”. Indeed, Jesus stated that his relation to the godhead was analogous to anyone else’s relation to the godhead—as when he told Mary Magdalene “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. Rather go to my brothers and say to them: ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my god and your god’” (20:17). This distinction is made clear on several occasions, when Jesus declaimed: “I of myself can do nothing [of my own accord; by my own devices]...for I speak not my own will, but the will of my Father” (5:19-23/30, 6:38, 14:24, 7:16-18, 8:15-16/28-29/38, 12:49, 15:15, and 17:7-8). In 14:24, Jesus explicitly states: “The words you hear are not mine, but those of my Father who has sent me.”

In 17:11, Jesus pleads with the godhead: “Holy Father, protect them in YOUR name, so that they may be one with you, as you and I are one.” In other words, others can be “one with” god (that is: achieve communion with the godhead) in the same way that Jesus is “one with” god. The point is reiterated in 17:21-23.

Acts 2:22 describes Jesus as “a man approved of god amongst you [the Children of Israel] by wonders and miracles which god did through him, to which you have born witness.” Throughout the New Testament, JoN himself speaks of “the will of the Father” rather than “my will”—a peculiar phrasing if he was an incarnation of the godhead (e.g. Matthew 26:39).

This is all in keeping with the both the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Matthew. JoN says to one seeking guidance: “Why do you call ME good? There is none good but the Father” (Mark 10:18 and Matthew 19:16-17). Another clue lies in the original Gospel (that of “Mark”), where JoN announces that nobody knows about the appointed day of the Last Judgment, not even “the Son”; but only “the Father” (13:32). This comports with the portrayal of JoN in the rest of Mark, in which the only verse invoking the “son of god” trope (the opening verse) was inserted—along with the ending (16:9-19)—much later. {17} It makes sense, then, that in Luke 1:35, it states that JoN will be CALLED “son of god” (rather than: he will BE the son of god).

The only tenable interpretation, then, is “Adoptionism”: The view that JoN was anointed by the Abrahamic deity (a “Messiah” in the literal sense), yet was not himself divine. Lo and behold: This was the earliest version of Jesus’ following: “The Way”.

As it turns out, the prevailing Christology of the Nicene creed was derived not from the synoptic Gospels, but rather from the Pauline letters—which in no way purported to be historical documentation. To wit: They were patently allegorical in nature. Saul of Tarsus used such poignant articulation as a heuristic strategy. Rather than an attempt to chronicle literal events, his letters consisted in idiomatic expression, employing the argot of the time so as to most effectively convey a theological point. {13}

Saul of Tarsus—a man who would have never met Jesus—wrote about Jesus as Christ qua savior of mankind.

In doing so, Saul intimated that Jesus was a sort of incarnation of the Abrahamic deity—as in his first letter to the Corinthians, in which he speaks of vicarious atonement for all mankind’s sins (15:14).

This redemptive language—replete with the “son of god” mytheme (which, as we saw in part one of this essay, was nothing new).

Also note that in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, during the fabled temptation of Jesus by Satan, the former rebuffs the latter by declaring that he will only to bow down to the godhead—a plea that would not make sense were he were himself an incarnation of the godhead. The offer made by Satan to JoN also doesn’t make much sense; as the former offers the latter sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the world (an offer that would be pointless if JoN were god incarnate). That fact that JoN saw himself as separate from the Father, which is also confirmed by the wording in John 20:17.

The only mention of a Christ-like figure in Palestine from a non-Christian source occurs in Tacitus—who referred to a group “popularly called Christians [who were] hated for their perversions.” He noted: “The name’s source was a [purported] ‘Christos’, executed by the governor, Pontius Pilatus during Tiberius’ reign.” That was all he felt was worth mentioning. Nothing more about the Christ-figure—the eponym of the movement—seemed pertinent at the time.

The Mormon version of Jesus of Nazareth is a LITERAL son of god (as opposed to god incarnate). Satan is his insolent brother. According to Mormon lore, JoN had three wives, and by them sired many children—of whom Joseph Smith was a descendent.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses version of Jesus is a warrior-angel (spec. the arch-angel Michael), who was created by the godhead (Yahweh) like any other angel. JoN and the Abrahamic deity are thus not one-in-the-same.

The Islamic position on the Trinitarian treatment of the Abrahamic deity is that, by identifying distinct facets of the whole, one undermines the principle of one-ness. The point of the Mohammedan movement was, in part, to eschew “shirk” (the association of the godhead with other things). This entailed rejecting what was seen as Christianity’s perversion of unreconstructed monotheism. The trinitarian brand of the Abrahamic deity was a defilement; and needed to be rejected. {14} In this sense, Islam sought to bring Abrahamic theology back to its Judaic origins (by rejecting Christology). Such an explicit conceptualization of one-ness is often called “monarchianism”.

In Islamic theology, the adamant emphasis on one-ness is captured by the conception of “tawhid”. Be that as it may, the term technically means divine “unity” rather than “singularity”, thereby tacitly qualifying modalism, mono-physics, and homo-ousion as viable ways to conceptualize divinity.

Perichoresis and hypostasis are other ways to reconcile *unity* with several distinct facets. Outside of the Abrahamic tradition, we encounter what is sometimes called “monistic panentheism”—a conception of divinity embraced by many Hindus (where each “god” is but a facet of the unified “Brahma”). Thus both

perichoresis and hypostasis are compatible with “tawhid”, and thus with Islamic theology.

In sum: Insofar as monotheism is conceived in terms of “tawhid”, the positing of ASPECTS OF said unity is sensical. Hence the traditional Islamic grievance with trinitarian monotheism (as “shirk”) is misguided. {15}

As we’ve seen, thinking of things in terms of triads is tempting. After all, the triangle is the simplest polygon. So it should come as little surprise that triangles / pyramids are such common didactic tools. And it’s no wonder that three is the basis for so many mythemes—be it triune deities or triptychs.

In part III of my series on “The Empowerment Of Women”, I enumerated instances of the Earth Mother archetype. As it happens, matriarchal deification often takes a tripartite form. Such “diva triformis” may be conceptualized temporally (birth, death, and renewal) or spatially (heaven and hell, with earth in between).

Threesomes also crop up in narrative form. Plot-points (three-act plays) and character groupings (three blind mice) often occur in triplicate. The most famous instance of this is the three “magi” in the Christian nativity story. These cynosures were said to have hailed from three fabled Eastern lands: Assyria (Balthazar), Persia (Melchior), and India (Caspar). The idea, it seems, was to symbolize the accession of Babylonian, Zoroastrian, and Hindu Faiths to the NEW king; and thus to the new Faith. {25}

Three is a magical number not only for conceptual triads; but for pictorial triads as well. The predominance of tripartite iconography is undeniable. Variations include the “Pa Kua” trigrams in Taoism, the “Ankh” in ancient Egyptian iconography, the “triskelion” in Mycenaean (Greek) art, the “triskel” in Celtic paganism, the “triquetra” in Germanic paganism, the “valknut” in Norse mythology, and the “Gankyil” in Tibetan iconography (which represents a variety of different triunes, including the aforementioned “triratna”). Meanwhile, the three Borromean rings provide a mystery that would make even M.C. Escher swoon.

Most notably, Nicene Christianity has the three stations of the cross (which actually doesn’t make sense, as a cross has four parts).

In also worth noting the significance of (the number) twelve. This is likely due to the fact that there are approximately a dozen lunar cycles each year: a astronomical phenomenon that almost everyone on the planet experiences. Let’s note 12 examples of this:

- **In Egyptian mythology:** The resurrected savior-god, Horus had 12 disciples.
- **In Assyrian mythology:** There was Tiamat with her eleven moons.
- **In Zoroastrian mythology:** The godhead of the realm of light, Ohrmazd had 12 “Eyzads” (deputies).
- **In Greek mythology:** There were 12 gods on mount Olympus.
- **In Norse mythology:** Odin had 12 sons.
- **In Jain mythology:** Time is divided into 12 segments—each with 24 teachers, the last of which had 12 disciples. Also significant in Jain lore are multiples of 12 (esp. 72).
- **In Buddhist lore:** There are 12 key stages of life.
- **In Sibylline lore:** There were 12 oracles.
- **In Mithraic lore:** There were 12 disciples.

Then there’s the Abrahamic tradition:

- **Judaic lore** posits 12 major prophets (not to mention 12 tribes of “Israel”).
- **Christian lore** posits 12 disciples.

- **Shia** lore posits 12 imams.

And, of course, there are twelve “zodiac” signs in astrology—a system that has its origins in Mithra-ism. Astrology dates back to the 17th century B.C in Babylon—though its earliest form did not seem to prize the number 12 (ref. the Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa). This “zoidiakos kyklos” [cycle of animals] appeared in Zhou China (“sheng-xiao”; likely as an adjunct to “qimen dunjia” / “da liu ren”), India (ref. the “Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra”), and Chaldea during Classical Antiquity...and is still patronized today by those prone to superstition. Such is the nature of universal resonance.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 As stated in the previous essay: One needn’t resort to quasi-mystical conceptions like Carl Jung’s “collective unconscious” to recognize a human nature—nor the existence of common threads running through the world’s widely variegated myths. There are, of course, treatments of archetypes other than the Jungian variety. Jung’s insight was that there is a psychological explanation for these universal patterns. Little did he know that evolutionary psychology would provide all the explanation we need; no mysticism required.}

{2 She was a derivative of Ishtar, other variants of which were Attar (Aramaic / Ugaritic), Astar (Abyssinian), Ashtar (Moabitic), Asherah (Canaanite). I adumbrate the ramification of this prominent goddess in part three of “The Empowerment Of Women”.}

{3 It might be noted that in the oldest surviving EXPLICIT monotheism, Zoroastrianism, the godhead is conceptualized as the quintessence (one might say, the Platonic form) of “light” and “wisdom”: “Ahura Mazda”. Sikhs followed suit, dubbing their godhead “Waheguru”: the ultimate teacher who brings light wherever there is darkness (see footnote 4 below). This cosmic scheme (Light vs. Darkness) was made most explicit by the Manichaeans and Mandaeans. I explore this topic in my essay: “Nemesis”.}

{4 The other Sikh monikers are “Akal Purakh” (for “timeless One”) and “Nirankar” (for “incorporeal One”).}

{5 Equating the godhead—or divinity in general—with LIGHT is common through most cultures. For example, “Amita[bha]” [“Amida Butsu” in Japanese], the quintessential manifestation of the Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism, is defined as the Source of Infinite Light. In ancient Egypt, Horus represented daylight, and thus the forces of good. In Assyria / Babylonia, the sun-god “Shamash” was equated with justice.}

{6 Shams[um] was a prominent Arabian goddess, and the godhead of the Himyarites. It seems that she had a Semitic background—as she was referred to as “Shemesh” by the Hebrews and as “Shemsha” by the Aramaeans. She was likely inspired by the Assyrian / Babylonian sun-god, “Shamshu” [alt. “Shamash”]. During its Sabaean period, the Aksumite goddess L-M-Q-H (now rendered “Al-Maqah”) was sometimes associated with the sun.}

{7 Barring control over the weather, the Koran’s protagonist does not incorporate the above themes. The Mohammedan conception of divinity appropriated elements from other popular leitmotifs—most notably the patriarchal deification that is emblematic of Judeo-Christian theology. After all, Judaic, Christian, and Islamic theology favors the masculine over the feminine in virtually every way. Rather than a nurturant female deity, the Yahweh / Allah is a machismo, authoritarian ruler (vindictive instead of beneficent, tyrannical instead of maternal) for whom humans are all slaves. Moreover, rather than a solar deity, the Mohammedan godhead co-opted the extant Arabian LUNAR deification of the Hijaz—in the vein of the Akkadian / Assyrian / Babylonian moon-god “Sin” (himself based on the Sumerian “Nanna”)—a deity

that became popular in northern Arabia (esp. at “Tema”) during Classical Antiquity. His counterpart in Urartu was a female: the moon-goddess, “Selardi”. Moreover, there was the Sabaean moon-god, “Almaqah” as well as the Qatabanic moon-god, “Amm” in southern Arabia (the latter was also seen as a thunder god). The result of this syncretism was a moon god (à la Hubal / Aglibol) cum FATHER god (à la Yahweh). The by-product was the Semitic derivative, “Allah”. Also note the Himyarite variation, “Rahman” [the Merciful], who was often equated with the Abrahamic godhead. (See footnote 8 below.) There were other lunar deities in the Middle East—notably the feminine “An-a-melekh” [“An is King”; based on the Mesopotamian sky-god, An(u)], who was worshipped at Sippar(a). Of course, MOST memes are derivative—a topic I explore in “The Progressive Case For Cultural Appropriation”.}

{ 8 The spoken Himyarite language was Semitic; yet, when written, it used the Sabaean script (alt. Old South Arabian). A similar process occurred with the development of Classical Arabic from its Syriac precursors (with respect to the Nabataean alphabet, basis for the Kufic script).}

{ 9 The godhead as a shepherd (and followers as his flock of sheep) is a common idiom—as I discuss in part one of this essay.}

{ 10 Hinduism offers a triune conception of the divine: Devi (Truth; supreme power) from whom proceeds Lakshmi (wealth / fortune) and Saraswati (wisdom). An alternative formulation is the “tri-devi”, comprised of a triad of goddesses: Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Parvati / Kali. In Shaktism, these three goddesses are deemed manifestations of the godhead, Maha-Shakti (see footnote 16 below). Buddhists conceptualize three ways of understanding Reality in terms of the three turnings of the celestial “Wheel of Dharma”. In Tibetan Buddhism, this “triple gem” is the “triratna”. Tibetan Buddhists also posit the three bodies of Buddha (the “trikaya”): Dharma-kaya, Sambhoga-kaya, and Nirmana-kaya. Meanwhile, the Three Roots (“Tas Sum”) of the Faith are Lama, Yidam, and Khandroma (see footnote 17 below). Prambanan (alt. “Rara Jonggrang”) is a 9th-century Hindu temple in Indonesia dedicated to the Trimurti: god as the creator (Brahma), the preserver (Vishnu), and the transformer (Shiva).}

{ 11 Note that the notion of a Holy Spirit can also be found in Judaic lore, as the “Shechinah” (divine presence); and alternately the “rua[c]h hakodesh” / “rua[c]h kadshkha” (divine inspiration; literally, “divine breath”). We even encounter “The Spirit” of god [“ruh”] (the divine breath, with which we are all infused) in the Koran—as in 5:110, 15:29, 16:102, 19:17, 21:91, 26:193, 32:9, 38:72, 66:12, 70:4, 78:38, and 97:4. 2:87 and 16:102 refer to the divine breath as the “Q-D-S” (as in “al-qudusi”). The earliest of this concept is found in Zoroastrianism—with the Avestan “spenta mainyu”: the “holy spirit” with which the godhead (Ahura Mazda) infused all of Creation. It could also be found in Ancient Greek philosophy, as the “pneuma”...as well as in the mystical versions of neo-Platonism. Regarding the coming of the so-called “paraclete”: Naturally, when a trinitarian Christian reads John 16:7-13, he thinks it is referring to the Holy Spirit; yet when a Muslim reads the same verse, he thinks it is referring to MoM. Such is the nature of prognostication: We see in it whatever we wish; and are at liberty to do so simply by reading between the lines. Alas: Prophetic verbiage is fertile ground for eisegesis. The problem with claiming that this term (“parakletos”) was an oblique reference to MoM is that the New Testament claims BOTH that god shall send it AND that JoN (qua Christ) shall send it, thereby insinuating that JoN WAS god. From the wording, it is clear that it is not referring to a person, but to something that shall permeate mankind (that is: something ETHERIAL that, as it were, both dwelled within each of us and IN WHICH we might dwell). The notion of a “Holy Spirit” pervading all things was likely a spin-off of the Neo-Platonist / Gnostic ideation of “Aeon”: an emanation of the divine (conceptualized as a kind of illumination). This beguiling yet vague notion has timeless appeal. In the 19th century, German philosophy had its own spin-offs: Hegel posited a “World Spirit” that governs—or is made manifest by—the course of human events. In marrying Buddhism with Kant, Schopenhauer posited a cosmic “Will” (inspired by the Vedic notion of “Brahma”). Then, of course, there is the Tao.}

{ 12 To say that we are “part of the body of Christ” and that he “abides within us” is simply to say we are “partaking in” (alt. “empowered by” / “redeemed by”) the divine; and doing so by way of Jesus’ message; and by what he embodies. This communion effects atonement for original sin, thereby enabling salvation-by-proxy. Christology PER SE renders the ineffable tangible—giving corporeality to that which has already been anthropomorphized in the abstract. Hence the Abrahamic deity incarnated as a literal person. The benefit of doing so is to make Yahweh more relatable, more accessible (i.e. more HUMAN). Vicarious atonement offers a simple solution to a vexing cosmogenic problem...a problem that is manufactured by that same cosmogony. (It’s a gimmick as old as time: Create the sickness, then offer the cure.) It is no wonder it caught on so well. }

{ 13 It is commonplace for hidebound ideologues to read sacred texts literally in cases where they were clearly written idiomatically. Note, for example, the use of the terms “God” and “Creator” in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, as well as in the writings of George Washington, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine (all non-religious Deists). Such men articulated themselves using the prevailing idiom of their era, as doing so would most resonate with their target audience. To take what was clearly idiomatic expression as a literal declamation—and thus explication of the architecture of the cosmos—is asinine. Yet religionists in the United States TODAY are eager to interpret such language as testament to the (necessarily) Judeo-Christian foundation of the Republic. It was nothing of the sort. }

{ 14 The Mohammedans actually had a poor understanding of the Christian “trinity”. They misconstrued the Nicene ternion as father (Yahweh), mother (Miriam), and son (Jesus of Nazareth). The authors of the Koran even thought that Jews considered Ezra [Uzayr] the son of god (9:30). This comes as no surprise, as such misconceptions seem to have been common in the Middle East around the time the “Recitations” would have been composed. }

{ 15 Where there IS a valid grievance is with Roman Catholics’ quasi-deification of the “Theotokos” [“god-bearer”] pursuant to the Council of Ephesus c. 431. This depiction was championed by Cyril of Alexandria, and became the basis for the “Virgin Mother” / “Madonna” motif that became so popular throughout the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages. (One might even call the Roman Catholic Mariology a kind of Madonna-fetishism.) Here’s the catch: “theotokos” (one who bears GOD) was a mal-adaptation of “kristokos” (one who bears Christ), the latter of which was the more accurate translation of the original Aramaic. This adjustment was made in Nicene Christianity so as to render JoN not merely the Christ (Jewish Messiah), but as GOD INCARNATE, in keeping with the Pauline letters. Another version of the “Holy Mother” motif was “Hodegetria” [she who knows the way], which had purchase in Byzantine iconography; and the “Mediatrice” [holy mother as intercessor], which held sway in Maronite circles (where Miriam was seen as a mediator in salvation). The “mother of god” theme can be traced back to ancient Egypt—with the virgin-mother Isis and her god-infant Horus. Marian sects are prototypical examples of idolatry. }

{ 16 There is also a four-fold conception of the proper way of life. This “sila” consists in dharma, artha, karma, and moksha. }

{ 17 In Mark 1:11, when god says to JoN, “you are my son” (at the baptism), it is idiomatic. The line is repeated in Luke 3:22. This becomes clear when we consider the rest of the statement: “With you I am very pleased.” Lest we suppose god was expressing approval with HIMSELF, it is plain to see that the “son” locution was being used in the traditional Judaic sense. This is further attested by the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is tempted by Satan immediately thereafter. Obviously, Satan was not testing the Abrahamic deity. }

{ 18 “Tiamat” was the name used for the (celestial) primordial waters; and associated with chaos (which was feminine) in contradistinction to order (which was masculine). We encounter the same dichotomy in

Egyptian myth (with Ma'at and Apep, mentioned in part one of this essay).}

{19 He is also known as “Manu-Vaivasvat[a]” / “Vaivasvat[a]-Manu” of Dravida. He was purportedly the son of Ravi Vivasvat[a] (a.k.a. Vivasvana / Surya / Aditya / Bhanu) of Navagraha. His son was the fabled King Ikshvaku (a.k.a. “Okkaka”).}

{20 Fuck the flamingos. (Though, it seems, aquatic animals would be spared. Hence manatees and manta rays were given a free pass.) Drowned animals across the entire planet were to be added to the deaths of countless, unsuspecting women and children. The method was ridiculously inefficient; as well as outrageous. The Judaic version of the Great Flood was the epitome of a gratuitously outlandish spectacle. We're expected to consider all the dead horses and giraffes—and all the dead mothers and infants—to simply be collateral damage in a grand cosmic reprimand.}

{21 Viracocha, the Incan creator-god, initially created a race of giant people analogous to the Torah's “Nephil-im” (giants who were allegedly the progenitors of homo sapiens). When he saw that they were disobedient to his laws, he wiped them out with a great flood. They were then replaced by the Inca's descendants, who obeyed his laws and so were blessed. Sound familiar?}

{22 The discrepancies between the Hebrew and Mohammedan versions are very telling. In the Koran (29:14), the authors state that Noah was 950 years old at the time of the flood. Genesis 7:11 stipulates that he was 600. Was this an attempted correction? An honest mistake? Or was it simply based on what the Koran's authors had been told by others—themselves illiterate—who had misheard through word-of-mouth? In the Koran, we are also told that the alluvion was Noah's idea, not god's idea. When Noah proposes that virtually the entire human race be eradicated (71:26), god thinks it's a swell idea; and so acts accordingly. This is an odd twist on the traditional Flood myth. According to the Koran, the wiping out of mankind is the result the Creator of the Universe honoring a rather drastic request. “Nuh” wasn't warned; he was the source of the idea. The Abrahamic deity simply obliged. Such garish modifications belie the authenticity of the Koranic account.}

{23 Nowruz was celebrated in Persia for over a thousand years until it was banned by Islamic powers. It is now a festival for Bektashis, Alawites, Alevis, and Baha'i. Only recently has it been re-incorporated into some Muslim majority countries—as an innocuous celebration of springtime, shorn of its pagan origins (see footnote 24 below).}

{24 The secularization of formerly pagan holidays is not un-common. Even most Christian fundamentalists celebrate the pagan (Celtic) All Hallows Tide (alt. “All Hallows Eve” or “Hallow-mas”; a.k.a. “Halloween”), an auspicious occasion with roots in the Gaelic “Samhain”...which, in turn, inspired the Brythonic (Welsh) “Calan Gaeaf”. Notably, “Christmas” has become a primarily secular holiday for the majority of people in “the West”—thereby bringing it back to its pre-Christian origins (as a commemoration of the winter solstice, as with the Germanic “Yule-Tide”). Only Christian fundamentalists now insist that Christmas is necessarily about the nativity of Jesus of Nazareth. (To wit: Christmas is only a religious holiday for those who happen to be religious.) As a point of comparison: Few who celebrate Saint Patrick's day now think of it as a religious occasion. I explore this topic at length in my essay: “The Progressive Case For Cultural Appropriation”.}

{25 Caspar was likely a variation on “Gaspar”—who was, in turn, based on the Indo-Parthian king, Gudaraparas[h]a (Romanized as “Gondo-phares”). These figures are rendered in Syriac as Larvandad [a distortion of “Vendidad”], Hormisdas [a distortion of “Ahura Mazda”], and Gushnasaph [as found in the “Cave of Treasures” by Ephrem of Nisibis].}

{26 Also note the tale of Alexander the Great being told that he was begotten by the godhead while visiting the oasis at Siwa—a scene that was repeated in the tale of Jesus of Nazareth during his own baptism in the Jordan River—perhaps at Wadi Kharrar, where the prophet Elijah was said to have ascended to heaven. An auspicious figure being christened in a pool of water was a common set-piece.}

{27 The claim that “Allah” made humans from clay is articulated explicitly—over and over again—the Koran: 6:2, 7:12, 15:26-33, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, and 55:14. Creator-gods crafting man out of clay pre-dated the Abrahamic version. For example, it can be found in the Sumerian legend of En-ki and Nin-mah. En-ki was dubbed “Ea” by the Akkadians / Assyrians, and “Ia” by Canaanites during the Iron Age. THAT may have eventually led to the moniker, “Yah” amongst the Jebusites, Amorites, and/or Edomites. (The Ancient Greeks rendered the name “Aos”.) The idea of crafting beings from clay was adopted in Ugarit during the Bronze Age—where the creator-god was “El” (basis for the Mohammedan moniker, “Allah”, adopted via the Syriac vernacular of the Nabataeans). Meanwhile, in Egypt, Khnum crafted man on his pottery wheel.}

{28 In ancient times, Pharaohs were alternately known as the “son of Ra” (i.e. the son of god). They were believed to be the incarnation of the solar deity. During Atenism, the godhead (“Aten”) was also referred to as “the Father” in heaven (represented by the sun); and the propounder of the creed, Akehen-Aten, fashioned himself the worldly proxy for that godhead. In his book, “Moses & Monotheism”, Sigmund Freud posited that the first exponents of the Mosaic creed were inspired by Akhenaten’s monotheistic treatment of “Aten”.}

{29 There were several emendations to the Gospels. The most notorious case is the original ending to the original Gospel (that of Mark), whereby the appearance of a risen Christ was added much later on—starting with the codex Bezae from the early 5th century. The Gospel initially ended with the 8th verse of chapter 16—as we know from codices like Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Later editions appended verses 9 thru 20, which feature a resurrected JoN. Such modifications were nothing new in Abrahamic lore. Going back to the Hebrew Bible, we might note that it was not David who was originally said to have slain Goliath; it was El-hanan ben Ya’re Oregim of Bethlehem (ref. chapter 21 of the Second Book of Samuel; sans the “brother of” insertion). It was not until Chronicles was composed that David was given credit for the deed. After all, ascribing such heroism to the soon-to-be-king of Israel made for a more captivating narrative arc.}

{30 A narrative is compelling insofar as the target audience is able to relate to it. Pitting brother against brother is an age-old motif, as it involves blood relations embroiled in some sort of feud. Hence the primary characters are both kin and adversary. With regard to timeless themes, this is something that would resonate with the majority of the target audience (men), as almost all of them would have had brothers...be they Hebrews or Romans or anyone else. It worked for the authors of Genesis in the 7th century B.C. and it worked for Quintus Fabius Pictor in his tale of Romulus and Remus four centuries later. It worked for Dostoyevsky in “The Brothers Karamazov” set in 19th-century Russia and it worked for Steinbeck in “East Of Eden” set in 20th-century California. A variation on star-crossed brothers is the ancient Hindu tale of Rambha (who attempted to please Agni Deva by standing inside fire) and Karambha (who attempted to please Varuna Deva by standing under water). Both failed in their attempts at penitence...something to which we can all relate.}

APPENDIX 1: Cinderella, Faust, and Rags To Riches: Timeless Tales

I explored the global incidence of Robin Hood figures in the Postscript to my essay: “The Progressive Case For Cultural Appropriation”. It crops up in cultures around the world; as it is a timeless tale: A heroic bandit that steals from the rich to give to the poor. As I showed, accounts of vigilante justice resonate with audience across all cultures. Let’s look at three more examples.

Most Americans are familiar with the story of Cinderella through Walt Disney’s 20th-century rendering. However, this post-dated myriad other versions:

- The Cinder Maid[en] (**Italian; then French and German**)
- Katie Woodencloak (**Norse**)
- Ashey Pelt (**Irish**)
- Rashin-Coatie (**Scottish**)
- Little Saddleslut (**Greek**)
- Conkiaj-gharuna [The Little Rag Girl] (**Georgian**)
- Pepelyouga (**Serbian**)
- The Wonderful Birch (**Russian**)
- The tale Maria And The Golden Slipper (**Filipino**)

Even Kashmir had legends of a kind-hearted girl who was forced to contend with a wicked step-mother. Against all odds, the protagonists comes out on top, overcoming tribulation to finally get her due. Such a tale instills hope for those contending with trying times.

Other tales are cautionary. Goethe’s most famous parable, “Faust” is best known for addressing the existential price of “selling one’s soul” (that is: compromising one’s moral principles for worldly gain). He was inspired by earlier Germanic folklore about “Mephistopheles”. The mytheme goes back many centuries, with a tale that appeared in the Vedic “Shakuntala”.

Faust was not a unique case; the mytheme recurred around the world—from the Welsh tale of “Dafydd Hiraddug And The Crow Barn” to the Neapolitan tale of “The Blacksmith And The Devil”; and from the Germanic tale of “Bearskin” to the Polish tale of “Pan Twardowski” . It even appears in an Islamic idiom, with Arabian tales about the Abbasid caliph, Al-Wathiq ibn Al-Mutasim (Anglicized to “Vathek” by William Thomas Beckford in the 18th century, when he rendered it in English).

The mytheme was later re-conceived by Oscar Wilde in the modern classic, “The Picture Of Dorian Grey”. Washington Irving used a similar narrative in “The Devil And Tom Walker”. The motif crops up yet again when Pinocchio was lured to Pleasure Island.

The moral of the story is best captured in the adage found in the Gospel of Matthew: “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his own soul?” In secular terms: The ultimate price of avarice is dignity. This is a timeless theme that transcends culture, which explains why it crops up again and again around the world.

Then there’s the inspirational “rags to riches” narrative; whereby the protagonist overcomes obstacles to ascend from a lowly life to a position of stature. King David is perhaps the most well-known case of what is perhaps the most inspiring plot in world literature: A man rises from obscurity / destitution to become great. What makes the tale so inspiring is that it is “against all odds”: an everyman (David) overcoming some leviathan (Goliath), subsequently rising to greatness (which, we are led to believe, is a matter of fulfilling one’s destiny).

This familiar plot-line goes back to Sargon of Akkad, a gardener from Kish (Sumer) who became king of the world’s first empire. He was set adrift in a wicker basket by his biological mother, and taken from the river to be raised in the capital city’s royal court. Ring any bells? It was recycled as the tale of Moses in

Abrahamic lore. This plot-line was also used for the Abrahamic figure, Joseph (son of “Yisra-El”), who rose from obscurity in Egypt after being ostracized in his native Canaan.

The classic Broadway musical “Annie” employs this timeless theme, using as its protagonist an orphan during the Great Depression. Here are a dozen more heroes who came from humble beginnings:

- Siddhartha Gautama of Lumpini was a wandering playboy...before jettisoning his mercurial hedonism to become the Buddha (6th century B.C.)
- Chinese peasant, Liu Bang, who rose to become Han Emperor Gaozu (3rd century B.C.)
- Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo of Picenum (father of “Pompey the Great”) climbed the hierarchy of the “cursus honorum” from peasant-status to become Roman consul (1st century B.C.)
- Byzantine rulers Justin (5th century), Theodora (6th century), and Basil (9th century)
- Persian coppersmith, Radman pur-i Mahak, who rose to become King Yakub-i Layth-i Saffari (9th century)
- Slavic (Christian) slave, Jawhar of Dalmatia, who rose to become a Fatimid military hero (10th century) *
- Kipchak (Turkic) slave, Anushtegin of Gharchistan [Hindu Kush], who rose to become a Seljuq “shihna” [military leader] and governor of Khwarezm (11th century)
- Mongolian nomad, Temujin of Khentii, who rose to become “Genghis Khan” (late 12th / early 13th century)
- Turkic peasant, Ivaylo, who rose to become tsar of the Bulgars (13th century)
- Dong-yi (Chinese) peasant, Zhu Yuan-zhang of the Huaiyi, who rose to become Ming Emperor Hongwu (14th century)
- Japanese peasant, Toyotomi Hideyoshi of Owari [Nagoya], who rose to become Emperor of Japan (16th century)
- Polish-Lithuanian peasant, Marta Helena Skowronska, became Empress Catherine I of Russia (18th century)

Each historical figure represents grit and aspiration; which is why such tales became the stuff of legend. In American lore, Caribbean orphan, Alexander Hamilton rose from obscurity to become a revered statesman, after being taken under General George Washington’s wing (18th century).

The message is a timeless one: “Anything is possible if you put your mind to it.” We ALL want to believe this adage; so tales that tout it tend to resonate with wide audiences. This is why the (hyper-romanticized) Horatio Alger myth caught on in America to the extent that it did...and continues to reverberate to this day.

The ultimate Horatio Alger icons were oil tycoon, John D. Rockefeller and steel tycoon, Andrew Carnegie (19th century)—both symbols of the so-called “American Dream”. **

The underdog rising to prominence—be it David or Joseph—is a timeless theme that appeals to everyone, everywhere. And new versions are always worth creating—as Alexander Dumas famously did with “The Count Of Monte Cristo”.

{ * In Islamic historiography, Cairo was founded by the aforementioned Jawhar of Dalmatia. }

{ ** This “up by your own bootstraps” trope is alluring, yet quixotic. As the ever-astute, ever-sardonic George Carlin once said: It’s called the American Dream because you have to be asleep to believe it. }

APPENDIX 2: The Pitfalls Of Mytheme-Milking

The prevalence of mythemes across cultures around the world (i.e. across epochs and geographies) is usually taken to mean that there is a universal proclivity to think of things in certain ways. This is true. But it can also indicate the presence of machination—as this universal proclivity can be exploited to serve a

purpose. Sometimes, then, the incidence of a mytheme is due to UTILITY.

Case in point: The great Filipino epic, “Corrido and the Life of the Three Princes; children of King Fernando and Queen Valeriana of Berbania” (a.k.a. “Ibong Adarna”) was composed by José de la Cruz (a.k.a. “Huseng Sisiw”) c. 1800. The author claimed that the tale was not his own, but originated in Europe...and was transmitted to the Philippines by the Spanish in the 16th century. He did this in order to give the story a sense of mystique “from long, long ago”...and thus a manufactured legacy. He pulled this off by giving it a European (read: ROMAN CATHOLIC) pedigree. The stunt worked.

Memes: do not colonize our minds by force. Rather, they finagle their way in. In this respect, every catchy meme is a Trojan horse.

The cooptation of extant mythemes is almost never done wittingly. There is rarely any deliberate appropriation going on (“motif-poaching”). For, whenever people engage in memetic repurposing, they like to think of their own version as authentic, not derivative. That is: Everyone is apt to consider THEIR instantiation of the mytheme to be SUI GENERIS.

Narrative embellishment typically exhibits a ratcheting effect—in that memetic accretion is sometimes irreversible. For once a nifty tidbit is incorporated into the memeplex, everything that happens thereafter is—at least in part—built upon it. That is to say: The integrity of the structure comes to depend on its BEING THERE.

And so it goes: Once a memeplex begins to calcify, it is rendered sacrosanct—if for no other reason than its architecture is like a house of cards. Even iconography dies hard. This is why Muslims still use the symbol that the pre-Islamic Arabians used for their moon-god, Hubal (the crescent).

The repetition of a signature idiosyncrasy / flub is an incontrovertible sign that mythemes have been appropriated. (For the same reasons, it is a sure sign that someone has cheated on an exam by copying a neighbor’s work.) The authors of the Koran make several glaring mistakes concerning Christian folklore. For example, in 19:28 they refer to the mother of JoN as the “sister of Aaron”, thereby confusing Mary of the New Testament with Miriam (sister of Moses) of the Old Testament. (Both 3:35-36 and 66:12 reinforce this mistake by identifying Mary, mother of JoN, as the daughter of Imran—who was, in fact, the sister of Aaron and Moses, Imran’s other children.)

In 20:90-100, we’re told that a Samaritan helped build the golden calf...when Samaritans did not exist as a people until over 1,000 later. Oops. 66:12 refers to Jesus as the nephew of Moses. Oops. 7:124 stipulates that the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt used crucifixion when that method of execution was not used until the Assyrians / Babylonians / Phoenicians introduced the sadistic practice many centuries later. Oops. (The practice was later adopted by the Persian and then Roman Empires). This last mistake is made even more comic, as the crucifixions were allegedly done AFTER the Pharaoh had the people’s hands and feet cut off. (So they were evidently MAGICAL crucifixions.)

The Koran also claims that the Jews think Ezra (“Uzayr”) is the son of god (9:30) and that the Christian trinity is comprised of the godhead, the son (Jesus qua Christ), and Jesus’ mother, Mary (4:169-171 and 5:116). And on and on. Such glaring mistakes are embarrassing because they concern such elementary things. This raft of erroneous statements reveals the many misconceptions Arabian Bedouins had about Abrahamic lore during the Dark Ages. But this is unsurprising, as Arabia—nestled as it was betwixt the Byzantine / Roman (Christian) Empire and the Persian (Zoroastrian) Empire—wound up with a farrago of partially-digested, obliquely-understood tidbits of Judeo-Christian theology. In aspiring to its own brand of monotheism, the Arabian version couldn’t help but be comprised of an adulterated hodgepodge of memes, cobbled together so as to yield a uniquely Arab religion.

The piecemeal appropriation of Abrahamic lore is further testament to the Koran’s fallibility. Indeed, the book repeats the Torah’s myths of:

- The Fall (7:16-28 and 20:115-123)
- The Flood (11:36-49, 21:76-77, 23:23-29, 25:37, 26:105-121, 37:76-82, 54:11-15, and 71:1/11/25-26)
- Jonah’s aquatic escapade (37:139-147)
- Exodus (2:49-55, 7:103-153, 10:90, 17:101-104, 20:56-80, 26:10-68, etc.)

...presenting all tales as actual history. 29:14 even notifies us that, at the time of the (non-existent) global alluvion, Noah was 950 years old. (!)

Of course, the authors of the Hebrew Bible themselves appropriated many of the tales that were featured in their scripture—most notably: the Flood story. Meanwhile, the Exodus story was likely based on the Hyksos of Avaris (who ruled the area during the 16th century B.C.), where the heroic figure was Osarseph (rather than Moses) and the Pharaoh was Bakenranef of Zau, who ruled in the 720’s B.C. * Zau [Coptic: “Sai”] was the temenos of the Creator goddess, Neit[h]. Avaris was later re-cast as Goshen in Abrahamic lore. The Semitic peoples there at that time were Qedarites (that is: Arabs, not Hebrews); and were eventually exiled to Canaan. (Ring any bells?) Even more telling, the names “Moses” and “Aaron” seem to have Egyptian etymologies. ** Plutarch held that even “Juda” was a name from Egyptian lore. (!)

There is also a recycling of Hebrew references to “Gog and Magog” (18:94 and 21:96). (I discuss the slew of antecedent lore recycled in the Koran in my essay: “Syriac Source-Material For Islamic Lore”).

The regurgitation of Abrahamic folklore by the Ishmaelites is not surprising. Indeed, the appropriation of extant folklore by new-fangled cults has always been commonplace. The fact is that those who compiled the Koran (as well as Mohammed himself, for that matter) were passing old Hebrew legends off as literal history. Why? Because they didn’t know any better.

As far as the Koran’s authors’ credibility goes, the confusion of myth with historical fact is somewhat incriminating. These are stories that we now know are not historically accurate. In fact, we now know them to be entirely fabricated. (Homo Sapiens did not originate from one particular male in a lush garden in Mesopotamia; the planet was never flooded; the events in Exodus never happened; etc.) YET...the authors of the Koran opted to include those primitive stories in god’s infallible account of the past. (The Koran does not present such re-tellings as mere parable.)

There are only two possible explanations for this—neither of which bodes well for the credence of the Koran. The authors were either (knowingly) making things up...or they were, shall we say, innocently naive.

The former explanation entails duplicity: If the authors were making THAT stuff up, then we must ask, “What ELSE were they making up?”

The latter explanation prompts the question: “If the authors were (accidentally) mistaken about THOSE things, then which other things might they have been mistaken about?”

As it turns out, not only were the authors peddling fiction as fact, they were hawking a deranged re-vamping of Abrahamic theology—as we see, for example, with pre-destination (most notably in Islam and Calvinism).

A defense of this fraudulent historiography is that the early followers didn’t really take any of it literally, so WE shouldn’t either. The problem with such special pleading is that Koranic verse was clearly not meant to be taken “just figuratively”. The Koran is emphatic that it is a CLEAR EXPLANATION (as discussed elsewhere).

The fact is that the authors—and most likely MoM himself, insofar as he existed—were purveyors of myth who didn’t admit that they were purveying MYTH. In their defense, they may not have even KNOWN that what they were relaying was just a set of recycled fables. But whether they were doing so wittingly or unwittingly, the verdict is the same. They were WRONG.

As we’ve seen, the Flood tale has been milked over and over again. And the tale of an auspicious figure receiving a revelation in isolation has been milked ad nauseam (as I discuss at length in my essay on “The History Of Exalted Figures”).

Oftentimes, the mytheme is put in the service of an agenda (i.e. as a way of promoting an ideology), as with the Horatio Alger myth (a version of the “rags to riches” tale that gives working-class people false hope when trying to succeed in a capitalist system). Ideologues are invariably addled by an abiding need to cling to antiquated myths—a case-study of which I explore in “The Forgotten Diaspora”.

For more on this, see “The Enigma of Reason” by sociologists Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier. Also note “Denying To The Grave” by Jack and Sara Gorman; as well as “The Knowledge Illusion” by Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach.

{* Reference Carol Meyers’ “Exodus” (2005); as well as Erich S. Gruen’s “The Use and Abuse of the Exodus Story: The Construct of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism” in Essays on Early Jewish Literature and History; p. 197–228 (2016). Also reference Manetho’s “Aegyptiaca”.}

{** Carol A. Redmount’s “Bitter Lives: Israel In And Out of Egypt” in The Oxford History of the Biblical World; p. 58-89 (2001).}

APPENDIX 3: The Logistics Of A Super-Being

So what’s the deal with godheads anyway? In the monotheistic paradigm, the idea is to portray the proposed entity as a concatenation of superlatives. Doing so entails taking every admirable trait that one can think of and simply declaring that the entity is the epitome of each one (Arabic: “Al-Muta’ali”). This typically involves five key areas. For each, I’ll give examples of how “Allah” is characterized in the Koran (with Arabic monikers):

- For capability, we simply say that he is *omnipotent*: “Al-Malik” / “Al-Jalil” / “Al-Qawiyy” / “Al-[mu-]Qadir” / “Al-Kabir”.

- For wisdom, we simply say that he is *omniscient*: “Al-Alim” / “Al-Wasi” / “Al-Hakim” / “An-Nur”.
- For sensory awareness, we simply say that he is *omni-present*: “As-Sami” / “Al-Basir” / “Al-Khabir”.
- For morality, we simply say that he is *omni-benevolent*: “Al-Adl” / “Al-Wadud” / “Al-Barr” / “Al-Muqsit” / “Al-Nafi” / “Ar-Rashid” / “Al-Karim”.
- For longevity, we simply say that he is *eternal*: “Al-Hayy” / “Al-Baqi”.

The godhead is thus all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-good, and everlasting. (Other coveted traits include beauty, bravery, and purity—each of which is touted in the Koran: the MOST beautiful, the MOST brave, and the MOST pure (or, alternately, the ultimate source OF such qualities). ANYTHING good is thereby attributed to the godhead.) More than the source of all that is good, this entity is neither transient or contingent; it is timeless and absolute; so we say that he is the ultimate source and the ultimate end of all things (the alpha and omega; “Al-Awwal” and “Al-Akhir”).

For everything we admire, the posited overlord is—by definition—the quintessence. Consequently, all that is good in the world can be attributed to him. But don’t mess up, because he HEARS everything, and SEES everything; and—more to the point—he can DO anything he wishes. Hence we are subjected to both a cosmic pan-opticon and a police force.

And so it goes: We take every virtue we can think of, and extrapolate to infinity. We then combine all of them, and ascribe the resulting aggregation to a singular entity. * The catch is that, in order to do this, we are forced to engage in anthropomorphization. In other words: We must *personify* the object-in-question, as the exalted traits are those that a HUMAN would emulate.

Naturally, then, such a super-being would be worthy of the utmost reverence—as it ends up being the most wonderful authority-figure imaginable. He is king-like, but in the best possible way. (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scripture all go so far as to say that the godhead is seated upon a LITERAL THRONE.) He issues edicts. He insists on being obeyed. He demands tribute. He represents might and triumph and all the other things that we mere mortals covet in our worldly existence. (The Church Of Latter-Day Saints actually goes so far as to posit a corporeal godhead.)

In Islam, the man who pioneered the literalist treatment of the Abrahamic deity was the “mu-jadid” [revivalist], Abu al-Hasan Al-Ashari of Basra, who—in the early 10th century—proclaimed that “god is firmly seated on his throne”; and “has two hands [as well as] two eyes.” This hyper-dogmatic mindset was put into overdrive in the late 11th century with the Sunni fundamentalist, Al-Ghazali of Tus—who’s literalist interpretation on scripture is unsurprising considering he had nothing but seething contempt for analogical thinking...or, for that matter, for anything that resembled philosophy or natural science (i.e. an “ilm” that wasn’t Islamic “ilm”). Even something as simple as CAUSALITY was eschewed by Al-Ghazali as blasphemous. (Things only occur because god has willed it; full stop.)

Insofar as we assume that such a fantastical entity exists, gushing respect—even unstinting obeisance—would seem to be warranted. We wind up with the notion of a monumental character taken to its logical extreme—that is: the ideal PERSON taken to supernatural proportions. Consequently, our will should reflect his will, as any divergence from it would be—by definition—misguided: a departure from an infallible will. (Heresy is, after all, the theological equivalent of treason. Blasphemy laws are the analogues of sedition laws—one in the religious context, the other in the political context.) Considering all this, doing things according to god’s will ends up (apparently) being the best possible justification for, well, ANYTHING.

In positing a godhead, one is effectively taking every virtue to which mortal humans aspire and imputing

all of them—in extremis—to a singular super-being. Supplicants need only point to that construct and conclude: “Behold! This is clearly something worthy of worship” ...all the while disregarding the fact that it is merely a figment of their own (collective) imagination.

Theism, then, is merely a matter of concocting a beguiling pseudo-concept, then asserting that it refers to something that—BY DEFINITION—exists (see Saint Anselm’s ontological argument). We thereby find ourselves playing a rather inane semiotic game—one that, upon critical scrutiny, does not pass epistemic muster. **

Is there a different way to handle superlatives—that is: to conceptualize the epitome of each virtue? For some, a cosmological division of labor makes more sense. Polytheism allots each quality to a different deity. In this theological scheme, any given deity represents something important—be it a character trait (e.g. wisdom) or a natural phenomenon (e.g. rain). One item per deity. Such theistic specialization enables specificity of worship. Seeking wisdom? Pray to the god[dess] of wisdom. Want rain? Pray to the rain god[dess]. The upshot is that one has a cast of characters, each of which—like humans—must have relationships and interactions. And THAT means that a drama must play itself out. A pantheon of deities provides the opportunity to spin fantastical yarns about the goings-on in the celestial realm; and how those goings-on affect worldly events.

In keeping with the Abrahamic tradition, Islam prizes the monotheistic approach. It thus involves a veritable orgy of superlatives. The most touted is that of mercy / compassion—alternately articulated as “Ar-Rahim” / “Ar-Rahman” / “Al-Ghaffar” / “Al-Halim” / “Al-Afuw” / “Al-Ra’uf”. Such ascription is comically ironic; as the overlord found in the Koran is ANYTHING BUT merciful / compassionate. Rather than forbearance, he epitomizes vengeance. Rather than seeking restorative justice, he is solely concerned with retributive justice. He comes from a place of authority, not of love. He’s conceited. He’s spiteful. He’s capricious. He’s petty. And, above all, he’s pathologically vindictive.

The exalted character traits enumerated in the various Arabic monikers do not AT ALL comport with the book’s protagonist. In fact, the esteemed qualities touted in his various monikers are flagrantly discordant with the way in which he is actually portrayed: self-absorbed, impetuous, temperamental, and—above all—vengeful. ***

Yet we are treated to a smorgasbord of delectable character traits whenever the Koran’s protagonist mentioned. Upon being presented with all those virtues, the query arises: “But how do we KNOW that he is that way?” The only forthcoming answer is “Because scripture says so!” Hence the assertions—occurring, as they do, in a holy book—are seen as their own verification. This is done in spite of the fact that the entity is depicted in ways that are diametrically opposed to most of the esteemed features. The superlatives justify themselves by dint of BEING superlatives.

How do religious apologists (a.k.a. “theologians”) get away with such casuistry? To answer this question, we might start by recognizing that theology is the opposite of philosophy. The sine qua non of the former is to be dogmatic—that is: to defend pre-established conclusions (which, being religious, are dogmas). The sine qua non of the latter is to COUNTER dogmatism. The ecclesiastic hoodwink is effected by passing off the former as “philosophical”. Doing so entails playing silly games while making it appear as though one is playing four-dimensional chess.

This brings us to the logistics of a super-being. Personification of the divine is paradoxical; as one is forced to ascribe the logic of consciousness (something that is perpetually in flux) to an absolute (something that is unchanging). This pseudo-concept is incoherent for at least ten logistical reasons; as each entails some sort of paradox.

ONE: To be conscious is—among other things—to react to new developments as they arise; to respond to pleas (prayers) when they are made; and thus to make DECISIONS at certain junctures. Hence something cannot be both conscious and timeless.

TWO: In ascribing sentiment to the godhead, one is forced to pretend that a perfect being can transition through various emotional states (being pleased, being perturbed, etc.); which means being influenced by contingencies.

THREE: Omni-presence precludes the kind of sensory experience (a perspective from within the physical world) that underlies consciousness; as it makes “Dasein” untenable.

FOUR: A conscious being invariably has motivations, interests, and desires; and thus experiences (dis)satisfaction. This is something that is impossible from the perspective of eternity and perfection. To speak of the divine as having a WILL (that is: an agenda), of expressing (dis)approval, of giving permission, of making choices, and thus wanting certain things, is thus nonsensical. When a being is omnipotent, it never experiences WANT.

FIVE: A being that demands obeisance—and that insists on being APPEASED—is a being that partakes in an eminently human relationship. Appeasement—like satisfaction—requires a pending psychical condition that is eventually realized, yet is not foreordained.

SIX: A being that demands to be glorified / worshipped is, by definition, an imperfect being; as such a demand indicates a yearning—thus a LACK—which can only be ameliorated by certain actions / thoughts on the part of others.

SEVEN: The essence of consciousness is the capacity to wonder—which involves both reminiscence (of a past) and anticipation (of a future). This requires temporality. It also involves some sort of deficiency that might be addressed over the course of time. A being that is omniscient (already knows everything) and perfectly complete (has no deficiencies in need of addressing) is therefore incapable of wondering. So the godhead—as advertised—lacks all the things that make conscious beings conscious.

EIGHT: Self-consciousness is an emergent property of underlying neurological interactions. The godhead is incorporeal. Ergo one is forced to posit an emergent property without the existence of the on-going physical activity from which it emerges.

NINE: Euthyphro’s dilemma entails an interminable catch-22. The basis of morality stems from the conundrum: Is it good / moral because god decreed it (divine positivism); or did god decree it because it was good / moral (moral realism)? EITHER WAY, the moral ballast for theism implodes. For either morality PER SE is rendered superfluous (as one need only obey commands, which are issued according to the whim of an ultimate authority) or the godhead is rendered superfluous (as there is a moral standard that exists independently of him). The latter is, in reality, the case. The former leads to divine command theory, which entails treating a (frequently defective) social construct as an absolute. Funny enough, apologists typically argue for the credence of their scriptures by assessing them according to moral standards that they are forced to admit exist independently of the scriptures being touted.

TEN: The problem of evil is insoluble. The raft of grave injustices that routinely occur all over the world (spec. those that do not stem from the exercise of free will) entails the following: If god exists, he cannot be omni-benevolent and omnipotent; yet if he is omni-benevolent and omnipotent, he must not exist. No theodicy has ever managed to resolve this; as no good reason can be given for the massive amount of pointless suffering and death of innocents—and the spoils routinely enjoyed by some of the most

despicable people in the world—in the midst of an overlord that has the power and the will to disallow such things.

For these reasons, a sentient divinity (esp. that is worthy of worship) is an oxymoron. Note that ANY ONE of the above poses a fatal theological problems. That ALL TEN are serve as dispositive makes apologetics an intractable task.

In sum: Theologians bamboozle the credulous by getting the utterly inane to sound beguilingly profound. Pulling off this stunt involves selling sanctified dogmas as indubitable “truths”; and then—whenever proselytizing—pretending that indoctrination is a kind of edification. After all, evangelism is a manipulative form of pedagogy.

{* Islam took this consolidation strategy a step further, and applied it to the last Abrahamic prophet: Mohammed of Mecca. In Judaic lore, different prophets serve as archetypes of different virtues. Abraham represented Faith as subservience, Job as resilience (dauntless-ness), Moses as leadership, Solomon as wisdom, Joseph as aspiration (conquest), Jonah as repentance, Daniel as courage, etc. In Mohammedan lore, the “Seal of the Prophets” represents ALL of these things. He was considered a trusted arbitrator, a leader, a fount of wisdom, a valiant warrior, etc. Most importantly, the Abrahamic deity handed the law down to him (as with Moses); and he was at the same time a conquerer (as with Joseph). Behold, then, the FINAL prophet (Semitic “K-T-M”, often translated as “seal”) emerges as the acme in a long succession of hallowed figures. A similar motif was employed by the Persian sage, Mani of Ctesiphon. In Manichaeism, Mani was seen as the culmination of a sequence of four prophets—beginning with Zoroaster, followed by Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus of Nazareth, and himself. His approach was syncretic; as he attempted to consolidate Mazda-ism, Buddhism, and Christianity under a unified theological message, with him as the pinnacle. The idea is to have a pre-eminent prophet who epitomized everything that each of the previous prophets had epitomized individually.}

{** In the Abrahamic tradition, religious apologists (a.k.a. “theologians”) try diligently to elide the callowness of their anthropomorphization; as they are obliged to masquerade as quasi-serious thinkers in order to maintain an illusion of credibility. They typically do this by imputing ineffability to their specious conceptualizations (i.e. of the godhead). After all, their strain of anthropomorphization isn’t quite as explicit as the anthropomorphization in the polytheistic traditions of the Norse, Africans, Greeks, or Hindus—what with the humanoid effigies and all-too-human melodramas. This gimmick involves characterizing eminently human traits as a mark of transcendence. Their strategy, then, is to dress up their puerile beliefs in the ornate raiment of nebulous phrasing; and then to call such legerdemain “sophisticated”. (Hence one conceptualizes something that one then insists is unfathomable.) The trick here is to make shallow thinking seem incredibly deep. Such pedantry doesn’t pass muster for those with astute (analytical) minds.}

{*** Evidence that the the Mohammedan godhead is pathologically vindictive is plentiful. We need only consult the Koran itself. In 2:251, 3:137, 7:4/92/137, 8:54, 10:13, 11:67-68/94, 14:13, 17:17, 18:59, 19:74/98, 20:128, 21:6/9/11-12/95, 22:45, 23:48, 25:36/40, 26:139/172, 27:51, 28:43/58/78, 29:31/40, 32:26, 36:31, 37:135-136, 38:3, 43:8, 44:37, 46:27, 47:10/13, 50:36, 51:46, 53:50/53, 54:34/51, 69:5-7, 77:16, 89:6-13, and 91:14, the Koran's protagonist essentially says, "Look at all the horrible stuff I did to THOSE people. I destroyed them. So you better watch out!" In 17:58, he threatens to do so again...to any and every city...in the event that he is ever displeased. The message is: "Appease me, or incur my wrath!" This is not exactly the mark of a merciful / compassionate being. In fact, the vainglorious self-regard exhibited by the Koran's protagonist is something one would only find in those who are insufferably narcissistic. And as for the obsession with vengeance ("May anyone who fails to comply with my demands burn in hell for all eternity!"): This is the kind of attitude one finds with only the most belligerent psychopaths.}