Nemesis

The Odious Utility Of Programatic Alterity:

Demonization of **the other** is a paradigm that resonates with all humans; as we are all, as homo sapiens, primally hardwired to be tribalistic. Consequently, we are predisposed to be suspicious–or even hostile–toward anyone who seems **foreign** (that is: different in some palpable way). Such a frame of mind means thinking of all possible interactions in terms of us (good, by definition) vs. them (bad unless proven otherwise). Behold: A splendidly simple way of seeing the world that triggers the lizard brain in all of us.

The allure of such framing stems not only from its simplicity, but from the fact that it ends up being ingratiating to anyone who espouses it. It's no wonder that exaltation of the in-group is a surefire way to galvanize those who see themselves as part of (whatever happens to be seen as) the anointed tribe; which is–as a matter of course–pitted against on out-group.

Once this "Manichean" worldview is brought to bear, the in-group is seen as interminably besieged by a menacing OTHER, and–whenever travails are afoot–assailed by the (alleged) depredations of the despised out-group. The natural

reaction, then, is: “We will continue to be imperiled lest some action be taken to ward of…THEM.” Insofar as a siege mentality is engendered, members feel obliged to circle the wagons, as it were. Insularity invariably ensues.

And so it goes: A tendentious Manichean worldview cannot exist without a tribalistic mindset, whereby all things are couched in terms of us and them.

It is no secret that this cast of mind can be tremendously gratifying; as it offers the prospect of valiantly rising up against a dastardly foe (subsequently, the hope is, conferring glory on the victor). In the interim, life’s casus belli is defined (as a plight); and members of the anointed group can bask in the warm glow of their false pride as they await the appointed hour (see my essay: “Brink Porn”).

As this can work for, well, ANY group (however defined), this way of seeing the world has universal appeal. The danger, though, is that such divisive thinking can’t help but lead to confrontation; and eventually set the stage for demagogy. Hence a charismatic leader can easily point to THE OTHER and declare–forebodingly: “All [y]our woes can be attributed to [insert scapegoat here]. So you need to trust ME to protect you (as I’m the one willing to take a decisive stand, on behalf of YOU). I shall wage war against the demonized outsider; ensuring that we insiders ultimately come out on top.” The implication is clear: “Arrogate to me sufficient power, and ‘we’ [the righteous] will triumph over ‘them’ [the depraved].” According to this thinking: It’s not just tribal honor that’s at stake; it’s subsistence.

The trappings of this (seductive) mindset are undeniable. Whenever there is a dire predicament, there needs to be a bold solution. Whenever there is an injustice, a reckoning is in order. Peril calls for drastic measures. So to promote a tendentious agenda, one need only persuade people that they are in jeopardy; and that ANTAGONISM is what will set things aright.

In the midst of such contention, there is fertile ground for any aspiring demagogue. There is a catch, though. This perfidious ruse only works insofar as the audience can be made to feel insecure; and–above all–resentful. “They’re out to get us” becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as one ends up creating a vicious cycle of recrimination and reprisal–fueling the very antagonism such posturing purports to address. Each side’s antagonism FUELS the other side’s antagonistic mindset, which serves to justifying its posture. {34}

Fear and anger are symbiotic; and both guarantee the defenestration of Reason. Therefore, sowing neurosis is the best way to get people to rally behind a militant "solution". LASHING OUT is, after all, cathartic…even as sound thinking goes completely out the window. It is no surprise, then, that insecurity lay at the root of all sycophancy.

Neurosis hijacks our critical faculties, thereby hamstringing our ability to engage in sound reasoning. So long as people are kept insecure (psychologically and/or materially), they are much easier to manipulate. Insecure people (i.e. those experiencing trepidation) are far more susceptible to the trappings of false hope (a topic I address in my essay, "The Island").

Here, we will survey the various incarnations of the Manichean worldview around the world, throughout history. In each case, we will encounter a worldview that boils everything down to a simplistic, binary cosmogony: an enthralling waltenshauung that hits all the right buttons. The Manichean worldview is a convenient way to make sense of an (otherwise bewildering) world. In psychology, the use of a binary taxonomy to make sense of things is known as "dichotomous thinking" (alt. either/or thinking, all-or-nothing thinking, zero-sum thinking). Thinking of everything in black and white terms undergirds such puerile framing: there's us and there's everybody else; and if you don't fit, then you must be THE OTHER (which, must be held in abeyance). {5} This approach often leads to the most virulent forms of tribalism, which is invariably predicated on reactionary thinking.

For the present analysis, Greek myth serves as a helpful point of departure. "Nemesi" was the ancient Greek term for retribution. "Nemesis" was the goddess of divine retribution; and so was the antagonist of "Themis", goddess of comity (that is: of natural order, in the peaceable sense). Like the godhead of the Hebrew Bible, Nemesis was a vindictive super-being–known for meting out divine punishment to anyone who had the audacity to cross her. And like Yahweh, her gripe was with impudence more than with injustice. (The serpent in the Garden of Eden was not promoting evil, it was simply entreating the first humans to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and so to do what Yahweh had forbidden.)

Unlike the Abrahamic deity, though, this super-being was feminine, not masculine. When personified, order tends to be depicted as masculine in authoritarian cosmogonies; in contradistinction with, say, an Earth goddess (see part III of my series on "The History Of Female Empowerment"). The salient point is that retribution is predicated on there being some sort of (formally designated)

nemesis. Tellingly, “nemesi” (foe) was inextricably tied to “hybris” (hubris); reminding us that conceit is required in order to maintain this self-ingratiating disposition; and to get such an adversarial–nay, ornery–posture to make sense.

So we find that designating an ENEMY is stupendously useful for propagandistic purposes (that is: getting people to go along with an agenda); as certain parties can be useful of “enemies” (viz. being seen in a foreboding light). In this sense, it is the PORTRAYAL that counts. For the very positing of a nemesis galvanizes True Believers–creating an urgency that makes it easier to rally them behind a cause. So enemies play a useful role in the prevailing narrative. Indeed, agit-prop couldn’t work WITHOUT them! The idea is to furnish the anointed group with a nemesis against which the in-group must wage some kind of epic battle; as this gives it a casus belli (read: a rationalization for an agenda that would otherwise be exposed as morally dubious). Participants in this charade are thus furnished with a MISSION that justifies their existence. {6}

So the appeal likes in both affinity (a source of gratification) and utility (we need to save our own hides).

The demonization of THE OTHER goes back to the Akkadian Empire’s account of the dreaded “Umman Manda” [“horde from somewhere”] in the 3rd millennium B.C. (They’re out there to get us! So we need to beware.) The portrayal of these nefarious OTHERS is typically as savages / barbarians. Hence the Roman characterization of the Gauls and the Gaels / Picts; and then of the “Huns” of the Eurasian Steppes (which simply meant “people”); and then of the marauding Vandals and Goths at the perimeter of the empire. The thinking here is as straight-forward as it is predictable: WE are sophisticates (who are “in the know”), and THEY are uncivilized brutes (who need to be tamed)…or staved off…or even eradicated… lest our existence be in jeopardy. (See my essay on “The Siege Mentality”.) The appeal to this captivating narrative is timeless; and–as we’ll see–transcends cultures.

So how does this characterization of THE OTHER work? A hint comes from the architecture of most folklore. Interestingly, when we tell / hear stories, we are sometimes as enthralled by villains as we are by heroes; and we sometimes confuse the two. This dual nature is best illustrated by popular caricatures of the following:

- **Mobsters** (from the Cosa Nostra in New York to the Yakuza in Japan)

- **Desperadoes** of the “wild west” (American frontier in the late 19th century) like “Wild Bill” Hickok, Henry McCarty (a.k.a. “Billy the Kid”), Charles Earl Boles (a.k.a. “Black Bart”), and Jesse James
- **Financiers** like Mayer Rothschild (of war-profiteering fame); James Fisk and Jay Gould (of railroad fame) {1}
- **Robber-barons** like John Davison Rockefeller Sr. (of oil trust fame); Andrew Carnegie (steel magnate of Pinkerton fame); and Cornelius Vanderbilt (of shipping fame) {1}

Of course, by “fame”, we often mean “infamy”. Notorious malefactors have played a key role in folklore since Azhi Dahhak[a] (a.k.a. “Zahak”) made an appearance in Persian folklore. And so it went with Mordred, who served as the spooky foil in Arthurian legend. The abiding infatuation with anti-heroes is reflected in the notoriety of Shakespeare’s Coriolanus, King Lear, and Macbeth. Even if the figures are downright reprehensible, our curiosity is piqued. Hence the legacy of, say, the Castilian cynosure (and Roman Catholic fanatic), Tomas of Torquemada–a figure who has served as the model for countless villains since his role in the Spanish Inquisition. In England, King Henry the VIII is the subject of endless intrigue. In America, New York’s “Boss Tweed” of Tammany Hall has served as a template for the dirty businessman that ensnares our imagination.

Meanwhile, our intrigue with Svengalis explains the delicious infamy of Shakespeare’s devious Iago and M.G. Lewis’ cartoonish harridan, “Matilda”. The devious, manipulative scoundrel behind the primary anti-hero is as old as the scheming Phoenician virago, Jezebel of Sidon. The fascination with scheming women dates back to the devious Mycenaean queen Clytemnestra of Argos (in Greek lore) and the conniving Philistine temptress, Delilah (in Hebrew lore). Also note the notorious Shulemite / Shunemite maiden who seduced King Solomon into worshipping the Canaanite god, Moloch. In Germanic lore, the Svengali took the form of Mephistopheles. Shakespeare epitomized the female Svengali with Lady Macbeth–a character we can’t help but both dread and admire. {2}

This gimmick continued through the Middle Ages, though a seductress was not always the culprit–as with the Sufi mystic, Zakariyya al-Ansari (vis a vis Mamluk Sultan Qaytbay); and the Sufi mystic, Khadir al-Mihrani (vis a vis Mamluk Sultan Al-Zahir Baybars)…on through Russian mystic, Grigori Rasputin’s bending the ear of Tsar Nicholas II. The ongoing bewitchment with Svengali persists to the present day

in halls of power around the world (invariably behind closed doors). Some might call it diabolical; others simply consider it shrewd. So long as there is a system, there will be those trying to "game" it.

The human obsession with villainy–at least insofar as NARRATIVES are concerned–leads to apocryphal tales as much as does our obsession with heroism. Sometimes we render such characters far more sinister than they probably were–as with, say, Judas Iscariot. Wherever there is a provocative story to be told, people will tell it… and others will be eager to listen.

The perverse intrigue of villains stems, in large part, from our fascination with the sinister. Subversion can be oddly titillating. It's why we've always been enraptured by ghost stories. (Who isn't mesmerized by the prospects of a vampire or ghoul or succubus lurking somewhere out there in the darkness?) Who cares if the protagonists were diabolical? They achieved domination, after all. And there is something exhilarating about conquest–no matter how brutal. For we are intoxicated not only by power, but by STORIES ABOUT power. Such characters–no matter how morally dubious–allow the darker angels of our nature to live vicariously.

Malevolence can captivate, and so has been used in some of the most riveting tales–from Shakespeare's Edmund (as well as King Lear's manipulative daughters, Goneril and Regan) to the cunning Hannibal Lector. Our tendency to be fascinated by scheming rascals is attested by the infamy of Shakespeare's preternatural, genderless rapscallion, Robin Goodfellow (a.k.a. "Puk"). He's up to no good, but we can't resist rooting for him anyway.

Just as some villains can be romanticized (insofar as they tantalize us), anyone seen as THE OTHER can be vilified (insofar as doing so legitimizes our worldview and/or validates the image we want to have of ourselves). In other words, even as we are sometimes infatuated with villainy, it can also be a tool we use to justify whatever agenda or self-image we may happen to have.

As it turns out, the light in which we cast people tends to reflect our own prejudices. Many historical figures end up being either a hero or a villain, depending on the biases of the story-teller / target-audience. Case in point: the Georgian potentate of Soviet Russia, Joseph Stalin. Behold a brutal tyrant who persecuted–and deliberately starved–tens of millions of Ukrainians, Turkic peoples, Mongols, and other ethnic minorities (derided as "Kulaks"); yet was for a time revered as an exemplar of human greatness by tens of millions of Soviet apparatchiks.

Meanwhile, TO THIS DAY, tens of millions of North Koreans are brainwashed into thinking Kim Il-Sung was a valiant hero; and HUNDREDS of millions of Chinese sycophants are still under the impression that Mao Tse-Tung was anything other than a calamitous imbecile. Even the most catastrophic of figureheads can be lionized if it serves a purpose (esp. bolstering the gilded legacy of the anointed tribe; abetting the interests of those in power).

All this stems from the fact that we are always tempted to demonize THE OTHER as it suits us. When we want to feel better about ourselves yet are addled with insecurities, the temptation is strong to put others down. THE OTHER is often named according to whether we think of them as ally or foe. It is easy to romanticize the former whilst vilifying (and DE-HUMANIZING) the latter–as with the 20th-century Vietnamese peasant revolution, whereby the Viet-Minh were labeled the (more menacing-sounding) "Viet-Cong" by American Cold Warriors, who orchestrated a genocidal military incursion against them. To this day, Americans forget that the pejorative "Viet-Cong" is a derogatory epithet concocted for propagandistic purposes to rationalize invasion. {9}

Derogation–nay, demonization–of THE OTHER is especially likely when tribalism predominates. This involves demands for conformity along some dimension–be it ethnically or ideologically. (Either is a basis for alterity.) Accusations of heresy is a form of this pathology. Hence, Christians see non-Christians as heathens. In the Islamic tradition, there is the demeaning characterization of non-Muslims as "jahiliyyah" (the insistence that Dar al-Kufr are in a state of ignorance). Such derisive nomenclature is used to identify out-groups who threaten the in-group's exalted status, stymie its designs, or encroach on its territory.

Bottom line: Alterity is an integral part of tribalism.

When it comes to justifying the deeds of one's own group, the key is to define THE OTHER as inherently inferior / evil; thereby legitimizing whatever measures are taken to–as it were–put them in their place (and thus securing the ordained status of the anointed group). Such spurious categories are little other than specious caricatures deployed to de-humanize anyone who is operating counter to OUR interests…or even anyone who is not "one of us". For THEY are depraved (by dint of being not us) and we alone are righteous (by definition).

The best-known use of this divisive taxonomy was the Roman Empire vis a vis EVERYONE ELSE (esp. pesky interlopers on the empire's vast perimeter). It was also used by European imperialists in both Africa and the Americas vis a vis the indigenous inhabitants–who dwelled on the expanding frontiers of the Occident's colonialism. Denying a people its humanity was integral to colonial designs; as subjugation was rationalized by hegemonic nations who were inclined to paint their exploits as righteous.

The routine, it seems, involves positing an exalted in-group; and then designating a (vilified) out-group against which it must be pitted so as to justify its self-aggrandizement. Thus Nazi thinker Carl Schmitt opined: "Tell me who your ENEMY is, and I will tell you who YOU are." This is indistinguishable from the credo of the Revisionist Zionist or the Cold Warrior…who convince themselves that they are merely the vessels of divine Providence. Both defined themselves by who they are obliged to fight AGAINST, then wrapped their designs in the garb of Manifest Destiny. {4}

History is often written according to such simplistic categories. That is: How we are inclined to think of "what happened" is couched in Manichean terms; and so based on false dichotomies. Historiography tends to put this comic-book portrayal of the world into overdrive. This is why the simplistic "good vs. evil" scheme is so popular in folklore and literature.

The theme of hero vs. villain pervades the world's cultures. The Slavic godhead was "Deivos" (a cognate of the Sanskrit "Deva", from which the Latin "Deus" was also derived). Proceeding from him was a cosmic duality: "Belo-bog" (white god) and "Cherno-bog" (black god; a.k.a. "Tiarno-glofi" meaning dark mind). The former represented the heavenly masculine (associated with light); the latter represented the worldly feminine (associated with darkness). This is in keeping with the tendency to associate order (here, as the heavens) with the masculine; and to associate chaos (here, as the earth) with the feminine. The former may be a sky-god; the latter is often associated with a roiling primordial sea (see my essays on "Mythemes"). In Russian folklore, good is represented by the heroic protagonist, "Ivan Tsarevich"…who is pitted against the dastardly antagonist, "Koschei".

There are the forces of good; and there are the forces of bad. Its enticement lay in its simplicity. In Islamic theology, we find the puerile leitmotif of the good angel and the bad angel–each perched on a different shoulder, bending our ear. Thus it is "munkar" (associated with sinfulness; that which is rejected) vs. "nakir" (associated

with goodness [“ma’ruf”]; that which is accepted). The Koran instructs: Enjoin “ma’ruf” and forbid “munkar”…as if this clarified anything. Alas, this way of representing temptation vs. rectitude is commonplace across cultures (see my discussion of Divine Command Theory in “The Universality Of Morality”).

And so it goes: The forces of light pitted against the forces of darkness. Even as the real world is not divided so neatly, an easily-digestible Manichean account demands this clear-cut, binary taxonomy. It’s as if everything were as simple as Jedi vs. Sith… or Strawberry Shortcake vs. the Purple Pieman. It is not for nothing that cartoonish versions of the world reduce everything to a straight-forward story in which the forces of good are pitted against the forces of evil:

- **The Justice League** (of DC superheroes) vs. **the Legion of Doom**
- **Lion Force** (Voltron) vs. **the Fleet of Doom**
- **Starforce** vs. **Gamilons** (Starblazers)
- **Autobots** vs. **Decepticons** (Transformers)
- **G.I. Joe** vs. **Cobra**
- **M.A.S.K.** vs. **V.E.N.O.M.**

According to the wonderfully simplistic narrative on offer, the former are CATEGORICALLY good while the latter are CATEGORICALLY bad. And that’s all there is to it.

This jejune conception of the world enables us to perceive things according to clear-cut categories. Such binary thinking seemed to make sense when it was the **Thunder Cats** vs. the **mutants of Plun-Darr**. However, once we grow up, most of us come to realize that the universe does not actually work in this manner. Sapience allows us to discard childish musings, recognizing them as gross over-simplifications.

Granted, this modeling of human events came in handy when–as kids–we ran around the yard playing “cops and robbers” or “cowboys and indians”. Yet, after adolescence, most of us learn that life is more complicated. Generally speaking, maturity enables us to eschew puerility in favor of nuanced thinking.

Alas, a tribalistic mindset gives us an excuse to remain callow into adulthood–that is: to be fanciful while pretending to be “in the know”. Dogmatism invites us to be unscrupulous whenever it suits our favored worldview; so nothing could ever possibly refute the consecrated conceptual framework.

Yet in the real world, good-ness and bad-ness don't work this way. {5} This was illustrated in the revamped incarnation of "Battlestar Galactica", where humans (ostensibly good) were pitted against the Cylons (ostensibly bad). As it turned out, this was a false dichotomy. We came to learn that BOTH were eminently human. The difference is that one was homo sapiens and the others were androids. (The same point had already been made in 1973 with Michael Crichton's "Westworld", rebooted in 2016 on HBO.)

We homo sapiens are suckers for a compelling narrative; and are partial to elegant formulas; especially when those formulas are self-serving. Who are the "good guys"? WE are. Who are the "bad guys"? Anyone who is different from us; especially if they hamper our agenda. These categories are not seen as circumstantial; they are taken as DEFINITIVE. Semantically, "good" and "evil" are fungible, allowing story-tellers to qualify things according to their narrative of choice…which is invariably self-ingratiating.

An illustrative case is 17th-century Maratha warrior-king, Shivaji Bhonsle of Raigad– who is considered a national hero by India's Hindus even as he was portrayed as a pirate by the Mughals and British colonialists. Just as he was a heroic figure to the former, he was a thorn in the sides of the latter.

The promulgation of a burnished legacy often demands a portrayal of each that is evocative in the desire way. We often forget that who we call "good guys" and "bad guys" sometimes says more about ourselves than about who we are labeling. This proclivity is universal. If one watches, say, a Thai film about the golden age of Ayutthaya, one will find the Burmese depicted as savages and the Siamese as sophisticates. Were the Burmese to make a film about the same events, the depictions would surely be reversed.

That which has been ordained by god is whatever one makes it. Hence the formulation of "Manifest Destiny" in the Americas as well as Adolf Hitler's iteration in his manifesto: "My Jihad". Merely asserting it suffices for an (allegedly) unassailable justification. {8} Such self-serving taxonomic perspectivism applies to the bespoke characterization of organizations as well. Note the pejoratives used for propagandistic purposes against the "communist forces" arrayed against imperialism, over the worse of the Cold War. Already mentioned was the nefarious "Viet Cong" [PLAF], a label use for Vietnamese peasants. Other examples include:

- The nefarious "Sandinistas" [FSLN] for Nicaraguan peasants {10}

- The nefarious FMLN for Salvadoran peasants
- The nefarious FARC and ELN for Colombian peasants
- The nefarious “Tupamaros” [MLNT] for Venezuelan and Uruguayan rebels
- The nefarious “Zapatistas” [EZLN] for Mexican (Maya, Chiapas, and Tzotzil) peasants
- The nefarious FLN for freedom fighters in Algeria (protesting French colonialism)
- The nefarious ANC for black South Africans (taking a stand against the U.S.-backed Apartheid regime)
- The nefarious UGT and CNT-FAI for Spanish / Catalonian socialists (taking a stand against Franco’s fascist regime)

The pattern is consistent: The rank and file fighting back against systems of domination / oppression. While some of these groups sometimes resorted to terrorist acts to further their cause (an opprobrious measure, irrespective of the merit of the ends; see footnote 3), their frenetic–often spasmodic–invocation of “communism” / “Marxism” had little bearing on the credence of the points Marx actually made; nor did it having much to do with the merit of anarchic principles (as nominally conceived).

And there are also:

- The (vilified) PLO for Palestinians defying Revisionist Zionist colonialism / persecution {11}
- The (vilified) PKK for Kurds vying for independence from Turkish rule.
- The (vilified) ETA (later, PNV) for Euskadi (a.k.a. “Basques”) fighting for independence from Spain.
- The (vilified) Tibetans and Uyghurs vying for independence from China.

When surveying the myriad examples, a common thread can be discerned. The plight of the Kurds for a sovereign Kurdistan, for example, is analogous–in several important ways–to the plight of the Palestinians for a sovereign Palestine. It has to do with self-determination on a tract of land that has been theirs for many centuries. {12}

This self-serving taxonomy is reflected in the simplistic archetypes: righteous warrior vis a vis barbarian. These labels–nothing more than convenient caricatures–often have the same referent. Which is adopted depends entirely on one’s vested interests. As is well-known, disparate accounts of important events often won’t

concur on who's good and who's bad. Was British mariner Frances Drake a marauding pirate or a valiant commodore? How about Andrea Doria of Genoa? Shall we think of the Ottoman / Barbary hero, Khayr ad-Din of Mytilene as the heralded "Kapudan Pasha" or as a nefarious corsair? In 1831, when Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in the American antebellum "South", he was guilty of sedition. So was he a hero or a traitor? Depends on who you ask. The same goes for Nelson Mandela vis a vis Apartheid South Africa or Simon Bolivar vis a vis colonized Latin America.

Agit-prop generally makes use of binary taxonomies–designed to categorize allies and enemies according to their amenability to the agenda-at-hand. That is: Categorization of "good guys" vs. "bad guys" is often done to serve one's own interests. U.S. foreign policy during the post-War era has provided a vivid illustration of this. {13}

And so it goes: A hero to some people is often a villain to others–as we find with the categorization of "terrorists" vs. "freedom fighters". Which was Che Guevara? How about Ho Chi Minh?

Often, we are so entranced by our own (self-ingratiating) narrative, we are blind to our own hypocrisy. Nelson Mandela was on the U.S. terrorist watch list until 2008. Yet PRIOR TO the end of Apartheid, Mandela was considered a terrorist…even as Saddam Hussein had been TAKEN OFF the list (until he became persona non grata in 1991). Such a juxtaposition is instructive when assessing spurious taxonomies.

To get such taxonomies to seem plausible, one is forced to elide much of what actually transpires whenever it does not fit with the anointed worldview. This entails tweaking the official record so as to comport with the desired narrative. Such is the nature of engineered "memory / forgetting" in maintaining a compelling narrative vehicle for the promulgation of one's ideology. Thus anything the in-group does is–BY DEFINITION righteous. The U.S. does not engage in terrorism! Really? But what of Iran Air 655? {13}

In the Occident AS WELL AS in the Muslim world, many have been earnest to demonize the Mongols–depicting them as some sort of savage OTHER (e.g. the barbaric "Mongol hordes" raping and pillaging their way across the known world). This is a historically erroneous caricature that I dispel in my essay on "The Universality Of Morality". Yet it is no secret WHY this disingenuous portrayal has been embraced. It helps make OUR OWN histories seem to make more sense. (In

reality, the Europeans, mired in the Holy Roman Empire, were more barbaric–and more uncivilized–than was the Mongol Empire. In fact, the Mongols were FAR more sophisticated–and FAR more PROGRESSIVE–than Europeans during the Dark Ages.)

The binary thinking that makes the Manichean worldview so enticing is–it turns out–precisely what makes it defective. Alas, such thinking is inevitable whenever tribalism is afoot; as its appeal lay in the fact that it is designed to serve one's interests–which is simply to say: it can be used to rationalize ANYTHING. That it is question-begging poses no problem. (Note that cult activity is like Novocain for cognitive dissonance.) For there are good guys and bad guys; and we need only designate who's who in order for everything to make sense. In such a scheme, whatever the former does it must be good; and whatever the latter does, is must be bad. Hence: In making moral judgements, we don't merely look to what the purported "good guys" do in order to determine what's right; and whatever their adversaries do in order to determine what's wrong.

In reality, doing the right thing is a function of the thing done, not of the identity of those doing it. (It's doing good that makes people–whoever they might be–good.)

Alas. Our penchant for tribalism is part of our universal human nature; which is to say it is an adaptation, courtesy of biological evolution. Understanding this, it is easier to see why in-group vs. out-group thinking emerged as a survival mechanism. In pre-historic times, anything foreign MAY WELL HAVE BEEN threatening. This was often a matter of practicality: OUR way of life and YOUR way of life likely reflected different adaptation matrices. When it comes to rituals, tribes in different environments likely adapted to accommodate different (biological) pathogen vectors. So when we encounter a different way of life, we are rightfully cautious–and may even say that you are doing things (and thinking about things) in the WRONG WAY. For if WE were to do that, we–being who we are–might run into problems. And so it went: Divergence from the norm meant risky. Therefore a tribalistic mindset was brutally pragmatic.

Meanwhile, different tribes generally operated under different circumstances; so due to sheer accident of history, they likely developed along different MEMETIC pathogen vectors–a contingency that led to the adoption of some dogmas instead of others (hell as an intolerably cold place as opposed to an intolerably hot place). In the end, foreign BELIEFS (e.g. believing in a sun-god instead of a moon-god) may have been seen as threatening as foreign PRACTICES (not just doing things to appease the

wrong god, but eating the wrong food). Holding THE OTHER in abeyance, then, was somewhat prudent. And the "doing things differently means doing things wrong" approach was a good rule of thumb.

All this seems to work out well for our tribalistic proclivities; as tribalism is consummate with this modus operandi. According to our primal intuitions, foreign practices are just plain wrong; while the way WE do things is THE BEST way. Hence the supposition that "OUR way is THE ONLY (acceptable) way" was a quasi-reasonable assumption to make (in strictly practical terms) thousands of years ago. In this sense, a puritanical mindset (replete with conformity and hyper-traditionalism as virtues) was not only self-ingratiating; it was a safety measure. {31}

Such thinking makes it much easier for US to rationalize the belief that WE are getting things right; and even more gratifying to suppose that we are uniquely special, and thus somehow superior. The problem is that EVERY tribe, insofar as it indulges in self-exaltation, succumbs to this temptation. For it works from EVERY PERSPECTIVE. As Nietzsche noted: "At the bottom of all these noble races, the beast of prey, that splendid blond beast avidly prowling about in search of victory and spoils; the Roman, Arabian, Germanic, and Japanese nobility; the Homeric heroes and Nordic vikings, they ALL shared this craving." Nietzsche lamented the fact that the pompous cynosures of each tribe tended to conduct themselves as if they were kings of the jungle (i.e. lions). He rebuked such hubris. (The Overman was not conceited. He was an autonomous being, not a panjandrum; and honored others' autonomy as much as his own.)

However, civilization has changed much of the equation. And the development of civil society has changed virtually ALL of the equation. Yet with many of those (once-valid) concerns well-behind us, we are still strongly inclined to give into our most vindictive nature. Justice is still seen by many as retributive, not restorative–a matter of the good guys triumphing over the bad guys. In other words, justice is about US WINNING, and THEM LOSING. But how are we to justify vindictive-ness? Well, we prize things like honor (of the group) as well as loyalty (to the group); and so relish the exhilaration of that intoxicating thing: glory. In other words, we sanctify our own hubris; passing a vice off as a virtue. Again: "nemesi" was inextricably tied to "hybris". Alterity stems from conceit; and so retribution is a hubristic act.

The upholding of tribal honor is inseparable from vindictiveness.

As mentioned, alterity invariably involves some degree of dehumanization, and even demonization. Hence the characterization of the Mongols as barbarian hordes; and the subsequent etymology of the derogatory label, “mongoloid”. Also note the etymology of “Tatar” (someone who is violent), a pejorative that was used to refer to an entire array of ethnicities (the Turkic peoples of the Eurasian Steppes).

De-humanizing the out-group is a universal phenomenon. Consequently, it is a cast of mind that transcends culture; and is the source of structural inequalities. This accounts for the skewed architecture of the power structures with which we must all contend–exigencies that both reflect and reinforce our deep-seated biases. Note, for instance, the story of “Gattaca”–in which mankind was divided into the “Valids” and the “Invalids”. The former were people who MATTER, and so those with access to the perks of society. The avenues of opportunity were open ONLY to those designated as “Valid”. In Pierce Brown’s “Red Rising”, it was the “Golds” and the “Reds”.

It is easy to justify campaigns against THE OTHER when one dismisses them as less than fully human (primitive savages). In America, Chinese laborers were dismissed as “coolies”, Native Americans were “Injuns”, while African slaves were dismissed as “coons” in the antebellum South. Muslim Arabs refer to non-Muslim Arabs as “Nawar”. The British referred to Indians as “wogs”. During the Vietnam war, Vietnamese peasants were referred to as “gooks”. In Judeo-Christian terms, THE OTHER is ascribed the “mark of Cain”…or some other INNATE DEPRAVITY. The examples are endless. The modus operandi is the same in every case: To exalt the in-group (e.g. the volkisch ideal) while vilifying–nay, dehumanizing–anyone who stands in its way. Divine ordinance is invariably invoked as a rational for this. ANY invidious taxonomy involves imputing to an entire group (usually an ethnic group) the depravity of a small subset–as if said depravity was INHERENT TO the group. We find this with Revisionist Zionists associating all Palestinians with Hamas (i.e. militant Salafi fanatics); or Donald Trump associating all Latino immigrants with criminality. The idea is to blame all problems on whoever has been designated the antagonism in this scheme. Such a stratagem is standard for any Messianic movement–be it Nazism or Christian Dominion-ism.

Every instance of this divisive scheme involves “feindbild”: the demonized caricature of THE OTHER, posited in order to justify the characterization of them as inferior…and oftentimes as the enemy (that is: as a force against which WE need to wage a righteous campaign). When it comes to tribalism, such unabashed mendacity is par for the course. Providentialism is endemic to Messianic

movements; for it is the ultimate form of self-righteousness. The license we accord to ourselves is “Manifest Destiny”; and is justified by claims of Exceptionalism (WE are uniquely special.) “It is part of god’s plan” / “It is god’s will” / “We are doing god’s work” (call it DGW Syndrome). The moment a group supposes that it has the imprimatur of the godhead, it has carte blanche to do whatever it sees fit; and to do so with an unmitigated sanctimony; as the privilege it accords itself is unimpeachable. (Dare you question GOD?)

It is not for nothing that Pope Gregory VII dubbed his plans for the first Crusade “The Lord’s Project”. He died before the campaign would be undertaken; but the theme prevailed, thanks to the zealotry of the Frankish pontiff, Urban II. According to this delusive thinking, we hear echoes from Deuteronomy 19:1 and 20:16–18: “Your god is going with you. He will fight for you against your enemies and give you victory”… reverberations of which were found in the Nazi mantra, “Gott mit uns!” [“God is with us!”] Such thinking has been found in Iranian-Iraqi war propaganda as well as the rallying cries of the mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980’s. “God is on OUR side; which means that our adversary is AGAINST god; which means that we are justified in whatever measures we deem necessary to triumph.”

Any attempt to reason with zealots afflicted with DGW Syndrome is utterly pointless; as they have disqualified themselves from meaningful conversation. God’s will is easy to invoke; all one has to do is assert it. {7} For the DGW rationalization to have purchase, one need only assert it with gusto. All deliberation is–conveniently–brought to an end. For the notion of “hakimiyya” (Arabic for god’s sovereignty over all things) is unassailable. It’s the ultimate trump card. For it enables anyone to invoke the DGW rationalization for any reason at any time, irrespective of what one might be doing. Once one is convinced that one is acting on god’s behalf, WHATEVER one does is automatically given legitimacy. By being proclaimed in this manner, an act is justified.

And so it goes: With the claim of divine ordinance at one’s disposal, ANYTHING goes. For one need only ascribe the godhead’s approbation to one’s deeds–whatever those deeds might be. Of course, those doing this are apt to invert the justification–holding that the diktats are what they are, so “Hey, what else are we to do? Our hands are tied!” But what it REALLY going on is the anointed agenda is entirely man-made; and the imprimatur of the godhead is ascribed POST HOC (and ad hoc). One can thus write oneself a blank check, carry out one’s agenda, and pass it off as simply obeying a higher power. The perk is that one needn’t question the

agenda. (For WHO ARE WE to question an omniscient super-being?) The fact that the super-being being invoked is a creation of our own imagination needn't be a problem. We thus find ourselves on a theological Mobius strip.

The appeal of Exceptionalism lay not just in self-aggrandizement; it lay in the fact that ANYONE can employ it. It has fungible utility; and so can be used as the substrate for any ideology. Put another way: The conviction that we've been ordained by GOD to do whatever it is we're determined to do is the ultimate omni-rationalization.

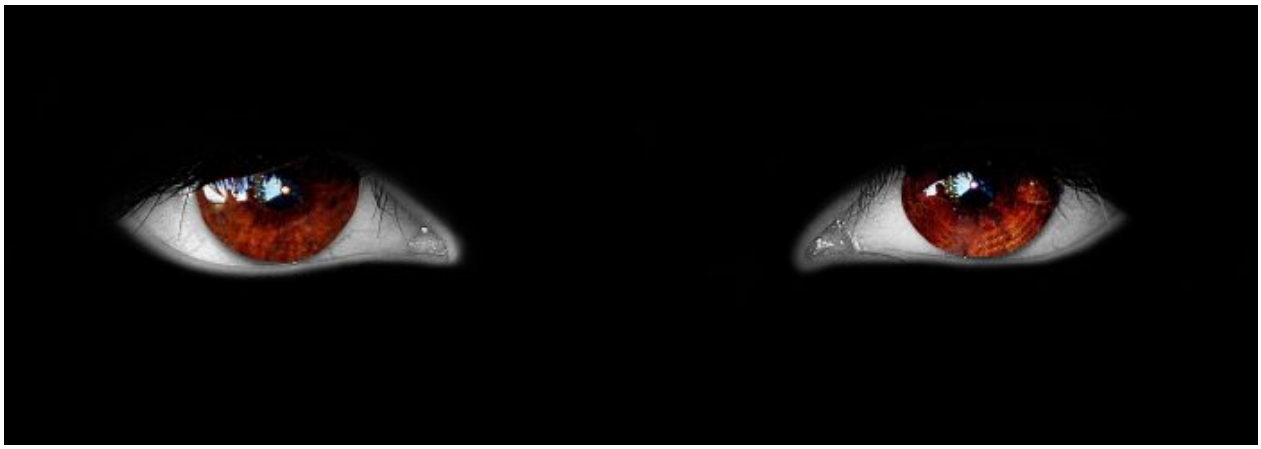
More to the point: Once one fashions oneself as some kind of holy warrior ("mujahid") within one's own Faith, commissioned by the Creator of the Universe to carry out his dirty work, any factors outside of the deity's unimpeachable will invariably become moot. Ergo, per the DGW framework, ANY agenda can be made righteous. "I'm doing god's work" is the easiest card in the world to play. In reality, it is only ever a matter of ascribing divine sanction to whatever one fancies.

How is the DGW syndrome to be addressed? As E.O. Wilson has pointed out, "A good first step toward the liberation of humanity from the oppressive forms of tribalism would be to repudiate…the claims of those in power who say they speak for god, are a special representative of god, or have exclusive knowledge of god's divine will. Included among these purveyors of theologic narcissism are would-be prophets."

It does not follow that because there is an innate proclivity for being tribalistic and dogmatic (and thus for engaging in cult activity), mankind is doomed to a life of tribalism and/or dogmatism (and thus of faulty taxonomies). We all have the wherewithal to rise above our primeval drives; to transcend our tribal dispositions and awaken from our dogmatic reverie. Religionism is not our unavoidable fate. Step one is to revisit the caricatures we so covet; and cease thinking of the world in strictly ways that merely suit our own interests.

It is tempting to make sense of the world in terms of good forces vs. bad forces acting in the cosmos, vying for sway over human minds. In other words: There is good and evil within all of us. This ideation is found in the Testament of Asher 1:5. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn so aptly put it, "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." In his novel, "Steppenwolf", Herman Hesse addressed these antagonistic aspects of the soul–struggling with one another for primacy. The same theme was used by Shakespeare in "Coriolanus", by Goethe

in “Faust”, and by Dostoyevski in “Crime and Punishment”. Every human has the capacity for both probity and perfidy. The point, then, is to ensure that the “better angels of our nature” prevail.



The Genealogy Of “Satan”:

The quintessence of goodness is typically personified by a revered deity–a point that needs little elaboration. Naturally, our predilection for anthropomorphizing what is otherwise nebulous is operative when it comes to the ultimate source of evil as much as to the ultimate source of good. Let’s turn, then, to the personification of evil; and see how this archetype crops up in cultures around the world.

In its earliest instantiation, the word “Satan” derived from the ignoble brother of Osiris, “Set”, in ancient Egyptian myth (via Coptic). This morphological adaptation likely occurred during the Ptolemaic era, as indigenous lore was coopted into the Hellenic repertoire to yield a hybridized theology (see my essay, “The Progressive Case For Cultural Appropriation”). As is often the case with creolization, this moniker was based on a minor taxonomic glitch.

In the earliest version of the myth, it was Set who fought the serpent of chaos, Apep[i] (rendered “Aphoph” in Coptic; “Apothis” in Greek). This embodiment of chaos was seen as the quintessential nemesis of “Ma’at”–who represented the natural order, and was associated with light (in contradistinction to chaos / darkness). The genealogy of this ideation in Abrahamic lore likely stemmed from Set being depicted as the fallen brother of the savior-god, Osiris. Hence the moniker for the Prince of Darkness in Christianity, Mandaeism, Manichaeism, and Islam has its origins in EGYPTIAN MYTH. {30}

The idea of the deified figure battling a cosmic serpent (chaos) goes back to the Assyrians–with the tale of Marduk and Tiamat. It also crops up in Vedic lore, wherein the nefarious super-being was “Ahi” / “Vritra”, who–lo and behold–was portrayed as a serpent. (For more on this, see my essays on “Mythemes”.) And in the Torah, we find the Hebrew moniker, “Nakhash” for the hissing serpent (herald of impudence) that led Adam and Eve astray in Eden, an act that precipitated a Fallen World. The leitmotif continued on through the Book of Revelation (12:9 and 20:2).

The SEMITIC notion of evil-embodied-as-a-serpent dates back to the Phoenicians, who associated the ills of the world with mythical serpents (disruptors of divine order). This likely influenced the development of the Judaic story about the Garden of Eden. We might note that “Gan Eden”–as found in Deuteronomic texts–was a variation on the (much older) Sumerian “Dilmun”. Meanwhile, the association of a serpent with knowledge (“Nachash” was the proprietor of the Tree Of Knowledge) dates back to the early Babylonian period.

It seems that we are all predisposed to personify whatever it is we deem to be “evil”. And so it came to pass that a Satanic figure served as the quintessential embodiment of evil. This (personified) cosmic force might exist for any of a number of reasons, can have any of a number of motives, and can possess any of a number of traits. What complicates the matter even more: The personification of evil can be based on any of a number of conceptions of “evil”.

One of the earliest instances of such a figure was “Angra Mainyu” (later known as “Ahriman”; alt. the embodiment of evil known as “Aka Manah”) in Zoroastrian theology. “Ahriman” was said to be the nefarious twin brother of the god-head, Ahura Mazda (nefarious because he was resentful of his twin’s superior power). Thus “Ahriman” was a celestial being with a grudge.

As it turns out, the Zoroastrian tale of “Ahriman” ALSO reflects Egyptian mythology, in which “Set” was posited as the evil counterpart (possibly even the brother) of the benevolent god-head, Horus / Osiris. The same theme would later be found with “Loki” in Norse mythology.

The Buddhist Satan-figure is “Mara”. The “temptation of the hero” leitmotif began with Mara’s attempt to lure the Buddha away from his righteous path (with an apparition of the former’s beautiful daughters). The theme is timeless. Five centuries later, the writers of the synoptic Gospels recycled the plot-point, this time with Satan and the Messiah cast in the starring roles (e.g. Matthew 4:1). John Milton

would play upon the same theme in his “Paradise Regained” c. 1671. In most cases, the personification of evil proved to be an effective narrative device…a fact that is clear even in children’s programing, whether it’s Mumm-Ra (the ever-living source of evil in “Thundercats”) or the jilted “Skeletor” (the hooded vicar of Hordak in “He-Man”).

So what of the MOTIVES and AGENDA of the “Big Bad”? It seems that an ax to grind is at the root of most evil entities–driven by a seething resentment for having been somehow CROSSED by the cosmic order…and so seeking to lash out in reprisal. The way this is done is by sabotaging the otherwise divinely-governed existence of homo sapiens–typically via some combination of deception and temptation.

As the godhead GUIDES, the adversary MISLEADS. Instead of putting us on the right path, he leads us astray. Instead of enlightening us (via some kind of illumination), he sullies our good sense (via some sort of gambit). This can be boiled down to an “Well, I’ll show them!” sort of spite. Sure enough, per Zoroastrian cosmogony, the modus operandi of “Ahriman” was **deception** (effected in the form of “daebaaman”). He would lead people awry via his proxy, “Aka Manah” (a.k.a. “Akoman” / “Akvan”): a crafty agent of temptation. His perfidy primarily lay in his instigation of “achistem manah” (the worst kind of thinking). The idea was to cajole we mere mortals into succumbing to our baser primal drives. (The Avestan “Angra Mainyu” is roughly translated as “destructive mentality”. It is rendered in Pahlavi as “Ahriman”.)

Thus virtue was seen to be a function of self-discipline: having the gumption to over-ride the nascent “achistem manah” within all of us (what the Greeks dubbed “enkrateia”). Vice was seen as succumbing to “daebaaman” (what the Greeks dubbed “akrasia”). We find the same kind of “right thinking” in Hinduism: “dharma”, by which one has cultivated sufficient self-discipline to remain on the right path (with the understanding that one can be led astray by one’s baser appetites if one is of weak mind).

The need to overcome temptation has typically been the foundation for accounts of avoiding “evil”. The Hebrews of yore posited “Ha-Satan”: an emissary of the god-head DELIBERATELY sent (by Yahweh) to give mankind CHALLENGES (as was the case with, say, Job). This was done so that humans might have obstacles in their lives to overcome (and thereby a chance to prove their fealty). Thus, in the Book of Job, Ha-Satan is effectively the proctor of an existential TEST (in keeping with the serpent in Genesis, which persuaded Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of

Knowledge). Adam and Eve's FAILURE of said test is the Christian basis for "Original Sin". Rather than temptation (as with JoN; or Adam and Eve), Job was saddled with tribulation.

In other words, the Judaic version of "diabolos" was not an adversary of the Abrahamic deity; it was serving a divine purpose–though a rather duplicitous one–ON BEHALF OF the Abrahamic deity. To wit: It was about creating adversity so that supplicants might prove their spiritual mettle. This theme was epitomized by the arduous trials that the Hebrews were forced to endure during their 40 years in the desert (Deuteronomy 6:13-16 and 8:3). To Recapitulate: The "Fall" in Eden (as recounted in Genesis) was essentially a failed test…for which mankind was forced to atone forevermore.

Note that throughout the Hebrew scriptures, "satan" was otherwise the Hebraic term for "adversary" (Numbers 22:22/32; First Chronicles 21:1; First Samuel 29:4; 2 Samuel 19:22; First Kings 5:4 and 11:14/23/25); not for the personification of evil (i.e. a maniacal demon-king). That is to say, the term was a general descriptor, not the name of a specific character–a personage who represented some nefarious cosmic force (pace 1 Peter 5:8, which compares the "adversary" to a lion seeking victims to devour). The kabbalists were obsessed with demonic figures like Lilith (ref. the "Zohar"). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, satan is described as the King of Tyre, and even the director of celestial music (Ezekiel 28). In Isaiah 14, he–peculiarly–speaks in the first person.

In keeping with the aforementioned Zoroastrian "Aka Manah", the Christian Gospels depict Satan primarily as a TEMPTER–especially of Jesus himself (Mark 1:13, Matthew 4:3, and John 6:15/26-31). That Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert was an odd plot-twist, as it entailed god effectively testing HIMSELF.

This prosaic leitmotif was nothing new in the 1st century. Indeed, the Buddhists had already been using the narrative device (i.e. a supernal agent of temptation) for centuries with the aforementioned "Mara" (likely derived from the Hindu goddess of death by the same name; or "Yama", the god of death)…who first tempted Siddhartha Gautama. "Mara" was subsequently the source of all human temptation (read: a natural force to be overcome by an act of will). In another sense, the ultimate "evil" in Buddhism is self-absorption / selfishness (read: succumbing to the wiles of "Mara").

The idea that humans are exalted–or, at least, enhanced–insofar as they are able to overcome obstacles (endure burdens and resist temptations) was also put forth by Ancient Greek philosophers–in the form of “enkrateia” (mental discipline, seen as the basis for virtue). The touting of “enkrateia” was an indictment of “akrasia” (whereby one is at the mercy of whims and urges); and thus an enjoinder for self-discipline. In keeping with this, the Bahai’i Faith posits Satan merely as the Id of our own psyche. In other words: the devil is none other than our baser instincts–which must be kept in check via sheer will-power.

Unsurprisingly, this has clear parallels in Eastern thought. Hindu theology refers to humans’ caving-in-to-temptation as “tamas”, sometimes attributed to the duplicitous interloper, “Kroni”. Some Mishnaic lore refers to such an interloper as a fallen angel–variously named “Azaz-El”, “Mastema”, “Sama-El”, “Samyaza” / “Semihazah”, or “Sathar-i-El”. In Mishnaic lore, however, Satan is NOT a fallen angel…nor is he even the embodiment of evil. Rather, he is a conniving–nay, devious–instigator. (The Classical Hebrew translation of the “ha-Shatan” is “the accuser”.) As we see in the Book of Job, he is a figure that chides and goads the Abrahamic deity in mischievous ways. Satan talks the godhead into making Job suffer horribly–and pointlessly–in a gambit to test the latter’s fealty (also ref. “Balaam” in Numbers 22:22).

As it turned out, “diabolos” (Greek) underwent an etymological ramification across Europe. Via the Vulgar Latin derivative (“Diabolus”), the Italians rendered it “Diavolo”, the Castilians (proto-Spanish) “Diablo”, the Portuguese “Diabo”, the Basques “Deabrua”, the Catalans and French “Diable”, and the Romanians “Diavol”. Meanwhile, via the Old English (“Deofol”) the Welsh rendered it “Diafol”, while the Dutch rendered it “Duvel”. Bosnians / Serbians say “Davo”. It is interesting that the Mohammedans truncated the “D” from the beginning of the Greek / Latin moniker when establishing the name of their fallen angel: “Iblis” (alternately referred to as “Azazel”, from Judaic lore). {14}

It is instructive to ascertain the ways in which etymological lineage has tracked with meme propagation; yet these things are not always concomitant. We find that, in many cases, the etymological origins of some words / phrases have little to do with their current meanings. (After all, linguistics is as much a feature of a culture as are memes.) Be that as it may, sometimes the etymological lineage can be quite telling, as with “diabolos”. Such a lineage MIGHT reflect the virality of a meme across cultures over long periods of time. The history of an idea might thereby be traced to its earliest roots.

An illustration of this is the menacing deity, “Yam[mu]” in Canaanite theology (thus found in both Ugaritic and Phoenician lore), which represented primordial chaos. The moniker is associated with the turbulent, unpredictable waters of the raging sea: uncontrollable and oftentimes deadly. As mentioned, the Assyrians had a similar deity, the nefarious “Tiamat”, associated with–or simply dwelling in–a dark oceanic abyss. Such deities posed as antagonists to the deified hero-figure. So what of Yam’s ignoble character? He was cast out of heaven (“Sappan”) for insolence (read: bucking divine ordinance), and so became resentful. Again, we find a celestial entity with an ax to grind; thereby explaining his sinister motives. This takes the form of SPITE: spoiling to sabotage the lives of humans–who are earnestly seeking to stay in the good graces of the god(s)– by luring them into folly. (If I fell out of favor with godhead, then I’ll make sure everyone else does too!)

This theme is as tedious as it is ubiquitous. In the Hebrew Bible (ref. Ephesians), Satan is described as “the spirit that woks in those who disobey”. Thus evil is not malice; it is disobedience (as stated explicitly in, say, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:2). Equating iniquity to defiance of authority is a tricky game to play when it is indistinguishable from the m.o. of every authoritarian regime since the beginning of time. We have learned that civil society does not emerge from a command-and-control approach to “law and order”.

As if to make matters more confusing, Satan is not ALWAYS associated with darkness. In the Book of Isaiah (chapt. 14), for instance, Lucifer is depicted as the “son of the morning” or “morning star”…a trope that dates back to the Sumerian goddess, Inanna…and continued on through the Greco-Roman “Venus”. It’s worth noting that “luc-ifer” is simply Latin for “bringer of light”, a crude rendering of the Hebrew “hay-lel”; in contradistinction to “noct-ifer” [“bringer of darkness”]. The Koine Greek equivalent was “heos-phoros” / “phaos-phoros”. It is worth tracing the emergence of this meme via etymology; yet the lexical metamorphosis is often not a straight line, so can be somewhat misleading. Such inquiries are complicated by the fact that, in any given place, several different words / phrases have been used to refer to the same thing over the course of time. Meanwhile, the connotation of any given word / phrase often changes over the course of time, as it winds up in new contexts. In the long-term, such exigencies entail a disconnection of onomastics from memetics. Even so, the etymology of a word indicates where people may have adopted a leitmotif; and–ultimately–how it came to be as it now is.

And so it went in Judaic scripture, where various nefarious characters were cast as the principle nemesis:

- “Mastema” (as found in the “Covenant of Damascus” as well as the “Book of Jubilees”)
- “Baal-i-El” (often rendered “Belial”; as in the “Ascension of Isaiah” and the “Book of Jubilees”)
- “Gadr-i-El” [Wall of God] (as in the Book of Enoch)

Other appellations included “Sama-El” (Venom of God), “Mash-hit” (Destroyer), and “Satan-El” (Adversary of God). This principle nemesis was invariably considered the angel of deceit.

In the New Testament, Satan is variously described as:

- “Baal Zebub”, ruler of demons (often rendered “Beezlebub”; Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15-19, and Matthew 12:24-28; lifted from the first chapter of Second Kings) {15}
- The “deceiver” (Luke 4:1-13 and 11:15; Matthew 4:1-11; and Paul’s Second letter to the Thessalonians 2:3-10)
- A sentinel in hell named “Apollyon” [a Greek version of the Hebere, “Abaddon”] (in the Book of Revelation)
- The (non-specifically-named) angel who was cast out of heaven for disobeying god

It is this last caricature that probably inspired the authors of the Koran to portray “Iblis” cum “Shaytan” as a fallen angel. (Also ref. Daniel 8:9-11 from the Hebrew Bible: a likely source of inspiration for any End Days scenario.) The entire point of the theological flourish was to discourage intransigence / defiance of the godhead.

And so we are told of a disgruntled angel with an abiding vendetta (per Ezekiel 28:15) and outsized ambition (per Isaiah 14:12-14) fell out of favor with the godhead. Such hubris that led to his banishment from heaven…and, subsequently, a seething resentment (a vindictive streak that led him to focus his reprisals on those who were vulnerable: mankind). The notion of a jilted angel being responsible for all the ills of the world has appeal, as it simplifies things (boiling all evil down to a singular culprit). (Satan’s banishment from heaven is also referenced in the “Book of Revelation” 12:9.) Hence the abiding leitmotif of a dastardly villain with an ax to grind.

The tale is retold throughout the Koran (2:30-34, 7:11-18, 15:28-35, 17:61-64, 18:50, 20:116-117, and 38:71-85). (Note that, per 15:35, Satan is not eternally cursed; he is only accursed until the Day of Judgement.) Mohammedans opted to re-name Azaz-El with an Arabicized version of the Greek term, “diabolos” (yielding “Iblis”).

The inclination to posit a “Big Bad” is understandable. The world appears to be a rather fucked-up place. This can be stultifying; not to mention exasperating. Oftentimes, it would seem that there are unseen, sinister forces at work–all conspiring against us. (This is made all-the-more apparent when grave misfortune befalls us “out of the blue”.) Indeed, there seems to be no rhyme or reason to destitution, diseases, and other tragedies…especially when they befall incontrovertibly good people. Supposing that there is a nefarious impresario–deviously operating “behind the scenes”–kinda-sorta seems to account for the raft of (otherwise inexplicable) injustices that relentlessly assail us. Such a supposition has the benefit of providing us with a thing that we can all BLAME…and SCORN…and declare war against…whenever we are forced to endure tribulation. The bonus is that we can simply assume anyone with whom we have enmity is in league with this omnipresent super-villain; a conceit that can be consoling in frustrating times.

There are other perks. This cosmogony justifies the existence of a protector-deity. For we find ourselves in a rather dire predicament: the “Big Bad” is lurking somewhere out there; and there’s seemingly nothing we mere mortals can do–on our own–to thwart it. Without our deity “going to bat for us”, we’re toast. (The deal is that he shall look over us so long as we continue to placate him. Keep in appeased, and he’ll ensure all is well. Fall out of favor with him, and you’ll be left out in the cold.) This grand cosmic clash has the added benefit of dramatizing human existence, giving the godhead an antagonist. {26}

This clash helps to make the world (almost) make sense. We are validated by having the righteous super-being on OUR side; and reassured, knowing that we will be protected insofar as we remain in his good graces. In this sense, the devil justifies god. Without the devil and his diabolical machinations posing an immanent threat, the need for god would not seem nearly as urgent. And when we are tempted to be iniquitous, we can attribute our moral lapses to this ultimate of saboteurs.

Positing an insidious supernatural entity for the purpose of conducting a test of will-power is tempting. Yet, oftentimes, supposing that there is an intelligent agent that provides obstacles (to deter us) and temptations (to divert us) is little more than a

provocative narrative flourish; and thus something to be taken allegorically. (Note, for example, John 8:44 in the New Testament.) Whether such an agent is merely performing a task assigned to him by the godhead or doing so to spite the godhead is a matter of narrative choice. (Note that the godhead portrayed in the Koran is HIMSELF the schemer who deliberately misleads certain people…thus leaving little room for Satan to play an important role in the proposed cosmogony.)

Alas, the ethereal notions of “good” and “evil” are often too abstract to grasp. The matter of making a FIGURATIVE explanation more relatable is to think of it in VISUAL terms. Ergo the ubiquitous use of light and darkness as a heuristic. It is worth exploring this semiotic routine at length; as it has proven to be so compelling across so many cultures.

Associating evil with darkness makes sense, as the inability to SEE things is, after all, often dangerous. Such an exigency naturally instills fear. The dark spooks us in part because it is associated with that which we can’t see. The optical becomes a heuristic for the psychical. For darkness represents the unknown; an epistemic blindness–which is itself quite frightening. It is no coincidence that the etymology of the Arabic term, “jinn”, may be derived from the Syriac term for “[that which is] hidden from sight”. Darkness is concomitant with danger and ignorance. For the unseen may harbor some kind of threat. {19}

In this sense, darkness (qua absence of light) is a rather un-interesting–nay, rather pathetic–thing of which to be prince! Ergo the Ancient Hebrew moniker for the devil, “Belial” is taken to connote “worthless” / “impotent”. Light EMPOWERS. Nay, it ENLIGHTENS. It is no surprise, then, that SOLAR deities–as beacons and/or providers of illumination–are typically associated with good things like wisdom, justice, and even salvation (as with the Semitic “Shamash”). Illumination (alt. “enlightenment”; “seeing the light”) is a metaphor for wisdom / insight; which is seen as an existential ballast. (It was for this reason that Hellen Keller entitled her book on religious epiphany: “Light In My Darkness”.)

The metaphorical use of darkness stands to reason. We are supposed to be scared of the dark; it is a rational fear that evolution has programmed within us (as perils we can’t detect may be awaiting us). And being able to SEE something (this includes cognitive functions such as recognizing and envisioning / picturing) is an obvious idiom, based as it is on LITERAL optics. Be that as it may, oftentimes our intuitions run amok–as when we speciously associate doves (white) with peace and

wholesomeness…while associating crows (black) with nefariousness. In fact, doves are dumb and rather intemperate; whereas ravens are highly intelligent and quite friendly. {33}

The spookiness factor of darkness is hard not to notice. Suffice to say, if one fashions oneself the “Prince of Darkness”, one is probably not a swell fellow. Good intentions almost always involve illumination of some kind. This is a reminder that an idiom often conflates the literal (in this case: the optical) with the metaphorical (in this case: the psychical). {20}

Physical manifestations of the divine (theophany) have taken many forms. Broadly speaking, the phenomenon might be called “hiero-phany” (a term coined by Mircea Eliade). This semiotic trick captures how that which is deemed sacred is considered the means by the divine is revealed (“hieros” means sacred; “phainein” means to bring to light). The motif goes back to the Bronze Age. The Ancient Egyptian god-head (“Amun” / “Ra”) was associated with light; while his nemesis (“Apophis” / “Apep”) was associated with darkness. {21} Also note the Persian demon, “aeshma daeva” (rendered “Asmodeus” in the Book of Tobit). Mohammedans described demons (“jinn”) as wafts of dark smoke (sans fire).

It makes sense that a point-counterpoint schema permeates most of the world’s theology. The dichotomy is typically cast in terms of light vs. darkness–as with the Ancient Egyptian “Horus” vs. “Set”, Ancient Greek “Aether” vs. “Erebus”, Ancient Turkic “Bai-Ülgen” vs. “Erlik”, and Ancient Slavic “Belo-bog” vs. “Cherno-bog”. The dichotomy is best captured in Manichaeism’s dualistic theology–in which the righteous (represented by light) are pitted against the forces of evil (i.e. darkness), led by the sinister “Ahriman” [alt. “Melech Kheshokha” in Syriac]. {22} We also encounter the motif in the (Aramaic) apocryphal prophecies such as the “The Book of the Wars of the Lord” [alt. “The War of the Messiah”; “The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness”].

The Light vs. Darkness dichotomy found Zoroastrianism (with Zurvan and Ahriman) would later be epitomized in Manichaeism. (The Manichaean heaven was dubbed the “Gardens of Light”.) In Syriac liturgy, heaven was also associated with “naheere” [light].

The leitmotif is also found in Mandaean cosmogony, with “malka dhshuka” [“king of darkness”]. To reiterate: The contemporary “Prince / Lord of Darkness” trope has not much more to it than the fact that darkness is scary: unknown perils are more terrifying than known perils. {18}

In Archaic Greek, the Divine was equated with Light in the concept, “pleroma”. In keeping with this paradigm, throughout Antiquity, the realm of light was posited as “pleroma” in myriad cosmologies–from the ancient Greeks to the Gnostics to the Mandaeans and Manichaeans. “Pleroma” also intimated a state of being filled by the divine. Again, illumination has a two-fold meaning: in terms of both optics and wisom (that is: as both LIGHT and as ENLIGHTENMENT).

And so we find the dichotomy in the New Testament–as with 8:12 in John’s Gospel, in which Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” The forces of Light vs. the Forces of Darkness invariably correspond to good vs. bad. Even in the Druze Faith, “Lahut” [the divine] is seen as the ultimate source of light. The Neo-Platonist / Gnostic realm of Light was known as the “Pleroma”, which was associated with Enlightenment. Indeed, light as MENTAL illumination is also a ubiquitous metaphor. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, for example, wisdom is associated with light (2:13). And the leitmotif also crops up in Eastern mysticism. Notably, a major book on Hinduism published in 1875 was Dayanand Saraswati’s “Satyarth Prakash” (The Light Of Truth).

Sure enough, in the Koran, the Abrahamic deity is referred to a the ultimate source of light (as in 24:35). The Ishmaelites’ holy book sells itself as showing the way from darkness into light (as in 14:1), a common motif found in Christianity, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. Even the scripture itself is referred to as a “light” (to the world). This is in keeping with the Christian tradition; wherein god incarnate (the Christ) was seen as a light to the world (Matthew 5:14-16; John 8:12 and 12:46). The idiom is found in Judaism as well–as with the treatment of the Torah (“teaching”), which is from the root “OR” (“light”, as found in Psalm 119:105).

In the Torah, the first thing the Abrahamic deity did (in his capacity as Creator of the Universe) to bring order to the world was to separate light from darkness (as roiling primordial waters); for THAT seems to be the most elementary way to make sense of the world.

In the New Testament, we are told that piety is a matter of partaking in the inheritance of the saints of light, who have delivered us from the power of darkness" (as in Colossians 1:12-13; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9).

In Gnostic Christianity, the Light vs. Darkness motif is found in the "Pistis Sophia" (with righteousness coming from the "Treasury of Light" and evil coming from the "Outer Darkness").

Examples of this motif go on and on. In ancient Norse cosmology, Myrk[r]-heim[r] (alt. "Nidavellir") was seen as the house / world / field of darkness (ref. the "Voluspa"). In ancient Hungarian myth, the personification of darkness and of evil were one in the same: "Ördög"…just as it was in ancient Prussian myth ("Peckols"), Maori myth ("Whiro"), Filipino myth ("Saragnayan"), and in countless other cultures.

Later, the basis for the Abrahamic cosmology of Mandaeism would be a grand, cosmic battle between the Lord of Light (good) and the Lord of Darkness (bad). The former is nameless, and serves as the godhead. The latter is a demiurge referred to as "Ptah-El". {23} This motif was even prevalent in Platonic thought, where the Form of the Good was associated with light (ref. the allegory of the Cave).

The environment in which people find themselves often informs the memes that are adopted. Hence, instead of light and darkness, the Koranic alternatives were shade and heat. Its target audience being desert-dwellers, it offered a reprieve from swelter (pavilions) and a quenching of thirst (rivers of milk and honey; plus an endless supply of wine without any hangovers). A Celtic god, who's target audience dwelled in cold, wet climes, would surely have designed his paradise a bit differently. Lo and behold: the Druidic "Summerland", a place where it was always warm and sunny. (For more on this, see "A Brief History Of Heaven And Hell".)

And so it went: Rather than illumination, the allure of the Islamic heaven is the slaking of primal cravings. This is to be held in stark contrast to the Far East–as the Buddha was not offering large-breasted maidens to those who died in battle. {24} Nor did carnal desire seem to be much on Jesus' mind.

In every case, we encounter binary thinking…and consequently a binary taxonomy.

As mentioned above, Zoroastrian's chief antagonist, "Angra Mainyu" was associated with darkness. This was in contradistinction to the god-head, "Ahura Mazda"…who was associated with light. Moreover, that the Avestan term for being divinely blessed / empowered, "khvarnah" [Pahlavi: "khwarrah"] has connotations of illumination; which makes sense, as divinity is associated with fire in Zoroastrianism.

Associating darkness with villainy is universal. In Japan, the heroine of the manga "Sailor Moon" battles the Dark Kingdom, led by an evil queen: a jilted girl named, Beryl (there we go again with an ax to grind). This even incorporates the motif wherein the feminine (as Queen Metaria) is equated with chaos (as "Shadow Galactica"), as was the case with the primordial waters in ancient mythologies. (The dark, primordial waters associated with the world before there was light is best known in the opening verses of Genesis. Also recall that the Assyrian serpent, "Tiamat" was female.)

This dichotomy is sometimes couched in terms of thesis-antithesis: an idiom that involves an interplay between creation and destruction. Such cosmogonic co-action is found in several cosmologies around the world–notably:

- **Hinduism:** Shiva "Nataraja" (sometimes manifested as [Kala] "Bhairava") is a destroyer who also creates (involved in the Yug[a] cycle).
- **Taoism and Buddhism:** The Yin-Yang dichotomy (involved in the cycle of Samsara).
- **Japanese (Shinto) mythology:** Izanami-no-Mikoto (a.k.a. "Izanami-no-Kami") is the goddess of both creation and death.
- **Norse mythology:** Thor's hammer, Mjolnir, symbolizes both creative and destructive forces.

A cosmogony of this sort does not involve "evil" PER SE…so much as it presents a progressive cycle of creative destruction. It is often articulated as the interplay–within each of us–between self-discipline and succumbing to temptation.

Another narrative trope that is pivotal: FALLEN-NESS. Per the Christian notion of original sin, ALL OF MANKIND of fallen. And Satan is more than happy to keep it that way (again: out of spite).

Mohammedan theology takes the angle-with-a-grudge motif to new heights. It renders Satan little more than a jaded seraph with an ax to grind. After rebuffing (then being rebuffed by) the Koran's protagonist, "Iblis" makes it his vocation to

mislead mankind. That is to say: His sine qua non is to sabotage the “din” of every human…all in a diabolical scheme to spite god. (The same theme is found with hellions like “Loki” in Norse mythology.)

What was Iblis’ (Shaytan’s) fatal crime? So the story goes: When the Abrahamic deity commanded all the angels to bow down to Adam (the first of the homo sapiens), Iblis–at the time, one of the angels–disobeyed; as recounted in 2:34, 7:11-13, 15:31-32, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, and 38:75-77. (Yes, the authors of the Koran found the need to repeat this anecdote SEVEN TIMES.)

Why such defiance? Ironically, Iblis’ grievance was in keeping with Koranic teaching: Why bow to anyone other than god himself? He did not think it made sense to bow to a PERSON. So his choice was to either commit “shirk” or to disobey god. {25} A problem arises here. For in standard Islamic theology, angels are said to not have free will. So it would have been impossible for an angel (Iblis) to have decided–of his own volition–to disobey an order (to rebuff the command to bow to Adam). In other words, Satan becomes god’s antagonist of his own choice; yet this could not be so if he had initially been an angel. Of course, god ordering all angels to bow to Adam–so as to show respect–would have also been pointless, as such propitiation on the part of volition-less beings would have been compulsory upon god’s command. (In any case, bowing to any being other than the godhead is considered “shirk”; so what is one to do when god commands one to commit the ultimate blasphemy?)

The predicament of Abraham’s would-be sacrifice of Isaac is illustrative of the same theological dilemma: Is it moral because god commands it or does god command it because it is moral? Abraham put blind, unconditional obedience over the inclination to refrain from committing a repugnant act. Iblis took the alternate course.

Why Iblis made this decision is up for debate. Hubris? Jealousy? Disagreement about the hierarchy of angel-human statuses? In any case, Iblis put a higher priority on what he deemed “the right thing to do” over obedience for obedience’s sake. Abraham prioritized things the other way around.

The up-shot is that Iblis was banished from heaven by a displeased celestial monarch…and consequently harbored resentment. He subsequently deigned to misguide all of Adam’s descendants (i.e. mankind) out of sheer spite. (His wiles, then, are simply a gambit to sabotage god’s grand project so as to “thumb his nose”

at his former master.) This explanation makes Iblis vengeful rather than inherently malevolent…which is, ironically, the exact character profile the Koran gives to god himself. (!)

This leads to the obvious question: Would not a perfect entity be above vengeance? If so, then what does that make the Koran's stridently vindictive protagonist? For his conceit in some ways SURPASSES that of Iblis (though the latter takes his grievance out on ALL of the human race while the former is vindictive "only" with MOST of the human race). In this sense, the Koran's protagonist is no better than Iblis. In any case, none of this makes the least bit of sense. Why not?

If Iblis wants to mislead mankind out of sheer SPITE, his endeavor would be rather gratuitous; for the Koran's protagonist is already doing so (proclaiming himself to be the best of schemers). In other words, Satan deigns to do what GOD HIMSELF is already doing anyway. But if THAT is what makes Satan "evil", then the Abrahamic deity HIMSELF must be deemed to be evil; and deemed to be evil for the same reason. Indeed, Satan is known as the deceiver; but the Koran's protagonist proudly announces that he HIMSELF deceives large swaths of mankind. Why? So that they will be damned. Satan even stipulates that he will ONLY lead non-Muslims astray–which is exactly what god says HE will do (per the numerous pronouncements in the Koran about pre-destination, in which god favors the fate of some over others). Thus, according to the Koran, Satan and the Abrahamic deity essentially play the same game with mankind; and thus play analogous roles vis a vis the misguidance–and consequently, the damnation–of billions of humans.

The Koran's authors obviously did not think this through very well. (If you're going to make up a story, at least get your characters straight.)

There have been myriad versions of the angle-with-a-grudge motif. The Abrahamic variety is but one of many. (Take, for instance, the Norse jötnar, "Surtr", who will return with a vengeance at the end of days to engulf the world in flames.) Here Satan is posited as a rogue agent (i.e. a "fallen" angel) of the god-head…who places obstacles in the way of humans just to spite his former master. {16} The nefarious being that sabotages mere mortals has had many names–as with "Erlik" by (Turkic-Mongol) Siberians or "Ordog" by western Turkic peoples (spec. Magyars). The embodiment of evil can even be female–as with the Akkadian she-demon, "Lamashtu", the Judaic "Lilith", and the Norse "Hel[a]". Even hobgoblins are often female–as with harpies (Greek) and banshees (Celtic).

Thus the evil that animates this “fallen” being is born of the same thing that animates human malevolence: (repressed) shame and resentment (in the form of venting). Iblis was contending with humiliation; and his only recourse–so far as he could ascertain–was to LASH OUT. His modus operandi was based in vulnerability, and impelled by spite (“I’ll show THEM.”). We find the same impetus lies at the root of malice when it occurs in homo sapiens. And so it went with Cain vis a vis Abel… then Isaac vis a vis Esau. {17}

The “fallen angel” trope seems to have been lifted from “The Cave of Treasure[s]”, composed by Ephrem of Nisibis in the 4th century. THAT may have been inspired by the so-called “Covenant of Damascus”, a Syriac document that was found both at Qumran (as part of the “Dead Sea Scrolls”) AND at the geniza (storehouse of books) at Cairo, in which the fallen angel was named “Mastema”: (a character that was also adapted in the Book of Jubilees.

Disgruntled angels aside, since the advent of Islam, Satan has typically been conceptualized as much more malevolent than merely a celestial being with an ax to grind. There seem to be more menacing characters than just an angel who refused to obey orders (orders that he thought were unjustified; ref. 2:34, 7:11, and 15:28-31 in the Koran). Nevertheless, the MOST nefarious depictions of Satan are a comparably recent development (as with the musings of authors like Dante and Milton); and are not something found in the theologies of Antiquity. Indeed, the demonic super-being (who was evil incarnate) became fashionable only after John of Patmos described the “Beast” in is anti-Roman propaganda. The notion of an inexplicably malicious entity was later put into overdrive after the (Roman Catholic) “Knights Templar” posited “Baphomet(h)” in the 14th century.

And so it goes: In Mohammedan lore, the root of all evil is a jilted “malak”.

But what of Satan’s worldly proxy? If we are to have a Messiah or savior-figure, should there not be his antithesis? Indeed. The son-of-Satan (i.e. false savior) leitmotif goes back to the fiendish “Zahak” [alt. “Azi Dahaka”; “Dahag”], son of the malevolent Angra Mainyu in Zoroastrian theology. According to Persian legend, Zahak was a member of the Arabian “Tayyi” tribe [alt. Banu Ta’i]. In Guarani myth, the fallen angel “Tau” is the ever-present bogeyman, luring mankind into all sorts of mischief. In Abrahamic lore, we encounter the same schtick.

The anti-Christ is alternately “the Beast” or the “whore of Babylon” in Christian millenarianism. It is the “Masih ad-Dajjal” in Islamic eschatology. “Dajjal” has been chained up on an island somewhere in the Erythra Sea (“Bahr al-Ahmar” in Arabic; a.k.a. the “Red Sea”). As the story goes, at the appointed time, this diabolical imposter-Messiah will become unchained and usher in a time of drought, famine, and pestilence. The idea is that he will wreak havoc so that he may then pose as the savior. {31}

Our penchant to ascribe intentionality to everything that happens is what drives animism; so it is only natural that we attribute the ills of the world to the machinations of some sinister force–a phantom menace lurking in the shadows, scheming to make bad things happen. After all, HOW ELSE could bad things happen…especially in a world ruled by an allegedly benevolent overlord?

Naturally, then, it is our duty to ally ourselves with the godhead, and to FIGHT the nefarious forces arrayed against us. But WHO are those forces? Well, THE OTHER, of course. Suddenly, the world makes sense. And our purpose is now crystal clear! Anyone who may have been disoriented (afflicted with existential vertigo) can now get his bearings. That is to say: This scheme gives one a sense of direction; and being so simplistic, it is readily adopted by even the most simple-minded of people. For pragmatic creatures, it is very pragmatic. And for the meaning-making machines that we are, it imbues life with oodles of meaning. Its appeal is undeniable. What good is a religion if it does not help one orient oneself in the world, and give one a sense of purpose?

So it comes as no surprise that many theologies around the world have posited an anti-Christ figure–as with “the Beast” in Nicene Christianity. The “Dajjal” (the false messiah in Islam mentioned earlier) is one of many instances of this motif. Behold:

- **Persian:** “Azhi Dahaka” (a.k.a. “Dahag”)
- **Judaic:** “Armilus”, chief antagonist of the coming Messiah in Judaic eschatology, who’s arrival shall augur the arrival of the long-awaited Messianic Age, “Olam Ha-Ba”. {32}
- **Hindu:** “Hiranya-kashipu”

Yet a singular worldly proxy is often not enough. To convince us that evil permeates a “fallen” world, there need to be demonic forces lurking around every corner. In Islamic theology, we are also told that Satan’s minions are evil genies (“[d]jinn”, derived from the Nabataean vernacular): a legion of fiends that were forged in fire.

Those “jinn” are just another version of the Zoroastrian “daevas” (a.k.a. “devs” / “divs”; esp. “varios daevas”): minions of “Ahriman”. (That lexeme seems to have derived from the Vedic term: “dev[a]”. Also note the Persian usage of “Peri”.) To further demonstrate Assyrian / Persian influences on Judaic lore, during the Exilic Period, Babylonian scribes posited “Ashmedai” / “Asmodai”, based on the Old Avestan, “Aesma-daeva” (known for inducing lust). {27}

Unsurprisingly, there were myriad other pre-Islamic Arabian antecedents–including “ifrit” / “afreet”, “qareen”, and “silah”; tales of which continued in Arabian folklore into the Islamic era, as the penchant for animism persisted.

The notion of spiritual beings charged with leading humans astray (demons) probably began in archaic Mesopotamia with the belief in “gallu[s]” (later Arabized to “ghul”; origin of the Anglicized “ghoul”), which were the henchmen of the god-head, “Enki”. Also note the Sumerian / Akkadian usage of “edimmu” / “utukki”; as well as the Chaldean “shedu” (a Babylonian term that inspired the Hebrew pejorative term for Canaanite deities). In ancient Indian mythology, “raksha[sa]s” were agents of “mada” (who posed as a spiritual impediment to “moksha”). Other versions included the “vinayakas” of Hindu theology–derived from the Sankrit term for “obstacle-creator” (“vighnakarta”)–and the “dasyu”. In Buddhism, there were “asuras”. And in African religions, there was a potpourri of nefarious beings.

Thereafter, the idea occurred in Ancient Greek mythology: the “Erinyes” (a.k.a. “Furies”)…and then in Ancient Hebrew lore: the “shedim”, a derivative of the Babylonian “shedu” mentioned above. Eventually, Judaic theologians posited “Beelphegor”, a diabolical character based on the Assyrian “Baal-Peor”–who’s sine qua non was inducing gluttony / greed. Meanwhile, Christian theologians personified greed as “Mammon”.

Mythology generally involves some kind of animated FOIL for mankind. Hence the idea of devious specters (who are determined to sabotage the lives of mortal men) has been commonplace throughout history. Indeed, it is no surprise that such entities can be found in folklore around the world: Norse (“jötnar”), Anglo-Norman (“goblin”), Germanic (“drude”), Celtic (“puca”), Chinese (“yao-guai” / “yao-mo”; “huli-jing”), Japanese (“yokai” / “oni”), etc.

In virtually every case, we find the same scheme at play: An admonition that there are spooky forces (somewhere out there)…and they are out to GET YOU. This sets the stage for the “You need X to protect you” sales pitch (where X is the appointed

authority). Wherever this formula is found, there is usually an effort to control people via fear. We might recall H.L. Mencken's observation that "the whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed–and hence clamorous to be led to safety–by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

And so it goes with "jinn". Presumably, we are expected to look to the god-head for protection from these conniving interlopers–which, we're led to believe–may be lurking around the next corner, eager to lure us into a panoply of vices. However, the super-being we REALLY need to fear, according to the Koran, is god himself. After all, it is HE who promises to mislead most of us. And it is HE who will eagerly damn us and–with great relish–carry out a series of horrific punishments in the hereafter.

Or, rather, he will delegate the task to Satan (and/or "Malik", the Arabized version of the Canaanite god, "Molek" / "Moloch") who has been charged as the warden of the cosmic penal colony called "Jahannam" (43:77). In any case, nothing happens in the universe except as god so wills it. {28} Yet with the protagonist of the Koran as the ultimate schemer / deceiver (reveling in the opportunity to punish those whom he has intentionally blinded / misled), renegade angels are the least of our worries.

It is telling that, like venerated deities, feared deities are depicted according to the sensibilities of the ambient culture. In Montesquieu's "Persian Letters" (1721), Rica writes to Usbek: "It seems to me that we judge things only by applying them secretly to ourselves. I am not surprised that Negroes paint the devil in dazzling white and their gods in carbon black. [Meanwhile] if triangles were to create a god, they would describe him with three sides." And if elk had a devil, it would surely be in the form of a lion.

The positing of a nefarious super-being (as the source of all that is bad in the world) is ubiquitous. It stems from our chronic urge to place blame. That is: Satan is based on the need to attribute all bad things to a sinister actor. {29} This is especially useful when it comes to instances of grave misfortune that cannot be attributed to poor decision-making (that is: to free will gone awry); for such things must surely be SOMEONE'S fault, right? Tragedy itself is thus anthropomorphized.

It makes sense that the ULTIMATE culprit is the personification of evil itself. By believing in such a diabolical character, we can channel blame for–and indignation about–all of life's tribulations toward a singular object-of-scorn. Thus we are furnished with a wonderful simplistic model of the cosmos.

For those who believe in a (putatively) benevolent godhead, there is the need to posit a FOIL; as a formidable antagonist is necessary to get narratives about a deified protagonist to make sense. (Every story needs a villain.) A nefarious super-being explains why–and how–BAD things happen in a universe governed by a GOOD super-being. Otherwise we would have no explanation for all the injustice and suffering we encounter after having placed our trust in our deity-of-choice. (In spite of tragedy endured, our fealty is not in vain!)

Confessors of the Abrahamic tradition are required to address the conundrum of theodicy. That is: They are forced to explain why we humans–created, as we purportedly are, by a deity that is supposed to embody probity–have a penchant for iniquity. It cannot be the godhead's fault; so there must be a bad actor working at cross-purposes. The existence of Satan seems to resolve this quandary in a satisfying way; though he does not ACTUALLY solve the problem.

In sum: Satan serves as a means of ATTRIBUTION and as an EXPLANATION. Belief that he exists satisfies our need to blame AND our need to understand. Hence the positing of a Satan-type figure meets both emotional and intellectual needs. It is no wonder, then, that the archetype crops up again and again in theologies around the world. The same goes for the motif of "light" vs. "darkness", and the intercession of angelic vs. demonic entities, bending our ear throughout life.

In the end, we can draw some conclusions from the preceding survey. When Faith begins from a place of FEAR, it is invariably dysfunctional. Happily, there is no need to posit malign spirits to account for the fundamental features of human psychology–our primal urges (or, for that matter, our capacity to conscientiously over-ride them). We have within us what Kant called "the moral law" (an innate moral compass, and the wherewithal to follow it of our own devices). Elsewhere, this has been dubbed, "the better angels of our nature". According to this understanding, when avarice gets the better of us, it's because we ALLOW it to. The only demons, it turns out, are the ones we create for ourselves.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 Proponents refer to such figures as “captains of industry” and “job creators”. The history of execrable tycoons goes back to the 14th-century Bavarian mogul, Eppelein von Gailingen–about whom legends proliferated for generations after his demise. Note the tales about the stupendous wealth-accumulation of the House of Rothschild (pioneers of usury, speculation, and war profiteering); or Jakob Fugger of the Lily (client of the House of Habsburg, and of the Vatican). In Russia, tales of the debauched House of Stroganov proliferate to this day. Much of it has become the stuff of legend.}

{2 The rubes who fall for this dastardly trick have been variously represented as Faust (German lore), Pan Twardowski (Polish lore), and Macbeth (English literature). There seems to be a fascination with both guile (on the part of the devious perpetrator) and temptation (on the part of an impetuous victim). The architecture of diabolical machinations–and the febrile psychology of those who succumb to it–

are timeless themes. Note how valorous Hebrew champion, Samson fell for the machinations of the cunning Philistine seductress, Delilah so as to win her heart. Temptation has always been man's weakness-be it for power or for sex.}

{3 A case in which the perpetrators REALLY WERE terrorists was the IRA: Roman Catholic Irishmen fighting against British sovereignty in Ulster. There have been Chechen terrorists in Russia and Somali warlords wreaking havoc on the African horn, Judean Settlers engaged in an ethnic cleansing campaign in Palestine…and on and on. I explore the history of Islamic terrorism in my essays on "The History Of Salafism". For accounts of terrorism perpetrated by the United States, see–among other material–the works of Noam Chomsky.}

{4 Another articulation of this modus operandi is from Hermann Göring: "Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you need to do is tell them that they are being attacked; then denounce the peace-makers for lack of patriotism and for endangering the homeland. It works the same in any country." Sound familiar?}

{5 Note that a common idiom for this dualistic ("Manichean") cosmology is LIGHT (equated with good) vs. DARKNESS (equated with evil), as discussed in Endnote *68. For example, in Zoroastrianism, we have Zurvan (good) vs. Ahriman (evil). In Manichaean theology, this was couched as the spiritual world (of light) and the material world (of darkness).}

{6 Whenever a regime wants to flout human rights–or even legitimize crimes against humanity–"SECURITY" is invariably the go-to pretext. "We're going on the offensive as a defensive measure!"}

{7 The term "eraadat Allah" means god's will. The notion that whatever happens happens according to god's will is captured by the CA term "hukm", which combines the notion of divinely-ordained provision with the will of the Abrahamic deity. We are thus obliged to act in accordance with "hukm".}

{8 The tract reads: "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator. By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord" (p. 65). "[F]or once Destiny had begun its course, the conviction has dawned even on the masses that this time not the fate of Serbia or Austria was involved, but [the matter of] whether the German nation was to be or not to be" (p. 161). Hitler averred that the "Volk-ish" patriot had "the sacred duty, each in his own denomination, of making people stop just talking superficially of

god's will, and to actually fulfill god's will, and not let god's word be desecrated. For god's will gave men their form, their essence and their abilities. Anyone who destroys his work is declaring war on the Lord's creation, on the divine will" (p. 562). It is a simple rhetorical gimmick to claim the imprimatur of the Abrahamic deity, as every Abrahamic cause–whether Judaic, Christian, or Islamic–has done since its inception. Such an assertion can be used to justify even the most blatant war crimes. For, as Hitler put it: "As a matter of principle, god does not make cowardly nations free," adding: "Lord, bless our battle!" (p. 622, 633). The eerie parallels between Nazism and Revisionist Zionism are impossible not to see. The common thread: "Doing God's Work" Syndrome, in which the exalted in-group is based on ethnicity.}

{9 "Viet-cong" was a pejorative for the "Viet Minh" (the communist Vietnamese peasantry) concocted by the quasi-fascistic (America-backed) Saigon regime for propagandistic purposes. It was coined to designate the "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam" as the TRUE enemy. In opting to invade the country, the U.S. government adopted the epithet to help cast its military incursion as a noble stand against a nefarious foe–thus forestalling a (chimerical) "communist" hegemony in the region. (The first domino to fall in what would become global Soviet domination!) This menacing-sounding slur helped paint THE OTHER as a savage–thereby dehumanizing millions of civilians, and making genocide appear to be a valiant act.}

{10 These dastardly "communists" were waging war against the valiant "Contras" for America-funded death squads–whom Reagan gushingly compared to America's Founding Fathers. That the "Contras" were committing FAR MORE "terrorism" than the Sandinistas was conveniently elided in this self-serving narrative. For a survey of interventions by the U.S. government during the post-War era, see the 2004 edition of William Blum's "Killing Hope".}

{11 Note this was a cause based on secular principles, which was pitted against a cause based on religious fundamentalism. Another stark contrast: Whereas the former was NOT ethno-centric, the latter WAS ethno-centric.}

{12 The plight of Revisionist Zionists for an "Eretz Israel" is entirely illegitimate, as it is based on religious fanaticism and racism. (It proceeds from fundamentalist Judaism; and its agenda is primarily that of ethnic cleansing.) Barring (the Salafi) "Hamas", the Palestinian cause is categorically secular; whereas a "Jewish State" is entirely about theocracy (as well as racial purity). By stark contrast, the Kurds tend

to embrace pluralism. Moreover, RZ is predicated on the fiction that the Jewish people's divinely-ordained "homeland" is Canaan. By stark contrast, the Kurds' ACTUAL homeland is Kurdistan…going back thousands of years. This dogma is based on the statement in Genesis 26:4-5 where the Abrahamic deity promises the Hebrews (alt. "Israelites"): "I will give to your descendants all these lands…insofar as you obey me and keeps my charge, my commandments, my rules, and my teachings." The Mosaic "covenant" is, of course, a fiction invented by Hebrew scribes during the Exilic Period.}

{13 The U.S. does not engage in terrorism! Really? But what of Iran Air 655? As it turns out, Iran Air 955 was a commercial airliner shot down by the U.S. military in 1988 (thanks to the captain of the U.S.S. Vincennes), killing 290 innocent civilians. Funny how we rarely hear about that incident. So it goes with ideologues' selective obfuscation of history. For the Cold Warrior, the slaughtering of Iranian civilians could be cavalierly dismissed as collateral damage in a noble war for American supremacy. This is a version of the "it's fine when WE do it, but EVIL when anyone else does it" standard (as seen by, say, Revisionist Zionists vis a vis Palestine to the present day). In February 1982, the U.S. government DE-categorized Iraq's tyrannical dictator, Saddam Hussein as "terrorist"–rebranding him a vital ally precisely when his terrorist activity was being ramped up. Meanwhile, what of the countless atrocities committed by the anti-communist death-squads in Latin America? No problem. THEY were deemed stalwarts of freedom–in keeping with the prevailing Cold War narrative. In 1989, we saw the RE-categorization of Panama's dictator, Manuel Noriega: from CIA asset to "terrorist". Also in 1989 was the RE-categorization of Saddam Hussein BACK TO "terrorist". It's as though the "terrorist" / "non-terrorist" labeling scheme were a TOGGLE, conveniently switched back and forth as the need arose (i.e. according to U.S. interests). Meanwhile, the execrable Wahhabi theocracy, Saudi Arabia, has been deemed a vital ally for the entirety of the post-War era…even as it is one of the chief exporters of militant Salafi ideology. Go figure.}

{14 Iblis is the recalcitrant angel who refused to bow down to Adam, as instructed by the Abrahamic deity; and was consequently banished from heaven for his impertinence…later harboring resentment…which he subsequently vowed to take out on mankind–out of sheer spite–by sabotaging their piety. This anecdote was taken not from Canonical Abrahamic lore. It can be found, rather, in apocryphal Judaic texts like "The Life of Adam & Eve" [Latinized as "Vita Adae et Evae"] and the "Book of Enoch"; and–most tellingly–in the Syriac "Book of the Cave of Treasures"

from the 4th century. This apocryphal account has god instructing Azazel (Iblis) to prostrate to Adam; a request that Azazel rebuffed, as it seemed blasphemous to bow to mere humans. The authors of the Koran clearly lifted the tale from these antecedent sources.}

{15 This moniker was also used in the "Testament of Solomon". "Baal Zebub" references the ancient Canaanite (Hittite / Philistine / Tyrian) as well as Phoenician / Ugaritic deity, "Baal"–a lexeme that can be traced back to antecedent Sumerian / Akkadian theology. When used in this context, it can be interpreted as "Lord of the Flies"–later rendered in Arabic as "Ba'al Zubaab".}

{16 Yazidis worship an errant servant of the Abrahamic deity who has since been redeemed (and is therefore NOT evil). Ergo: A demiurge in the form of a peacock named "Tawuse Melek" (a.k.a. "Melek Taus"). As with "Iblis" in the Koran, this subversive angel refused to follow a command (to bow to Adam), and was consequently banished for his brazen insubordination. He now has a bone to pick with his former master…which is precisely why most Muslims consider Yazidis' reverence for "Tawuse Melek" to be blasphemous.}

{17 Only a psychopath is iniquitous "just for the heck of it", with no rhyme or reason. Note that even the most insidious ghouls in folklore typically do what they do because they have an ax to grind. That is: They have been thwarted, even humiliated, and are now exacting vengeance for the perceived slight. It is a hunger for retribution–and thus for validation–that drives them. Even the most terrifying demon is simply seeking a satisfaction that he lacks. This is why an ultimate nemesis makes no sense; as there is no sensical End Game. Nefariousness is, at its root, an expression of weakness. We might ask: Once Sauron (himself neglected by the gods) takes over Middle Earth, THEN WHAT? What would justify his existence once the shire is a dank and dreary wasteland. With the corpses of hobbits strewn across the scorched landscape, what remains to be done? One can only toast with orcs for so long before it starts to become tedious. It might be noted that Sauron was merely the lieutenant of Morgoth Bauglir (the analogue of Satan), HIMSELF a fallen angel. For he was originally Melkor of the Valar / Ainur, servants of the one, true god: Eru Iluvatar.}

{18 The ultimate existential nemesis is not always associated with darkness. In Abrahamic lore, "Asmodai" / "Asmodeus" is not necessarily associated with darkness. Neither is "Abaddon" (Hebrew) / "Apollyon" (Greek). Paradoxically, "Heylel" (Hebrew) / "Lucifer" (Latin) means "bringer of light"–a strange idiom for the

“big bad”. Moreover, when evil is personified, it is not even necessarily male. In Judaic tradition, “Lilith” and “Agrat bat Mahlat” were demon-queens. In Armenian myth, the goddess “Spandaramet” is ruler of the underworld.}

{19 As if to confuse matters, Saul of Tarsus wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians that Satan could transform himself into “an angel of light”…presumably, to trick us. Hence the subsequent–seemingly paradoxical–appellation in Vulgar Latin, “Lucifer” (“Bringer / Bearer of Light”).}

{20 The idiom of light not merely as goodness, but as ILLUMINATION, stands to reason. Indeed, as one becomes wiser, things don’t get darker. Thus “enlightenment” is generally considered a good thing; while being “in the dark” is generally considered a bad thing. Hence the common association of a godhead (typically seen as the epitome of wisdom) with the ultimate source of light: the sun.}

{21 The salient dichotomy is alternately cast in terms of enlightenment vs. blindness–as with the Hindu “Vidya” vs. “Avidya” or the Buddhist “bodhi” vs. “moha”.}

{22 This schema invariably leaks into fable. In Star Wars, the Sith were bourn by the Dark Side of the Force. In Middle Earth, there was no sunlight washing over Mordor. Indeed, when a place is dark, it is foreboding…even menacing. Perpetually overcast, no rainbows grace the bleak environs in which nefarious entities dwell. The idiom of light AS ILLUMINATION is salient. When navigating a dystopian wasteland, erudition is as much anathema as pink lemonade. It is no wonder that no universities are to be found in apocalyptic hell-scapes.}

{23 Mandaean theology is rather confusing; yet it incorporated familiar leitmotifs. Ptah-El was one of a trinity of demiurges. The other two were Abathur, who sat in judgment of mortal souls, and Yushamin, a fallen being who–deigning to create a world of his own–was banished by the Lord of Light for his conceit. Mandaeans considered Abraham and Moses to be false prophets, while fancying “Yahya ibn Zakariyya” (a.k.a. “John the Baptist”) to be the preeminent prophet. Strangely, they considered “Ruha d-Qudsha” (the “Holy Spirit”) to be evil.}

{24 Though Hinduism did try to combine a god of wisdom and of militarism, with Kartikeya–part philosopher, part warrior.}

{25 Alas, what is one to do when god commands one to commit what is supposed to be considered the highest sin?) An obvious paradox ensues (leading to what is referred to as the “Euthyphro Dillemma”. Which is transcendentally prior: god’s dictates or morality? Does this trump the transgression known as “shirk”?}

{26 Antagonists of the godhead are key elements in any Manichean cosmogony. It is a motif that dates back to Sumerian mythology from the 3rd millennium B.C. In ancient Egypt, “Apepi” was the serpent-god (representing darkness) and thus the ultimate nemesis of Amun-Ra (the sun-god). In the earliest Indo-Eurasian epics, the serpent-demon “Ahi” is the arch-nemesis. In Guache mythology, “Guayoia” is the nefarious god of the volcano. Etc.}

{27 “Ashmedai” was rendered “Asmodaios” in Koine Greek. It was later Latinized to “Asmodeus” when the Roman Catholic Church incorporated the “Book of Tobias” into its Old Testament canon at the Council of Carthage c. 397 A.D.}

{28 The warden-of-hell motif takes several forms. Sometimes, the character is morally NEUTRAL, as with Osiris in Egyptian myth, who judges the souls of the dead in “Duat”. In the Far East, Yama is the warden (neither good nor evil) of the “narakas”, who determines the fate of souls…thereby facilitating the cycle of “samsara”. Only in some instances is the god of judgement characterized as wrathful (as with the “dharma-pala”). In Buddhist cosmology, the warden of hell is “Yama” (alt. “Imra”). In Taoist cosmology, he is Yen Lo Wang (alt. “Yan Luo”).}

{29 This is typically not used an excuse to shirk personal responsibility. After all, the point is to resist the lure of Satan–who is, the story goes, striving to sabotage mankind’s moral compass. Hence the onus is on US even as the saboteur is SATAN. The problem with this is that it all ends up being an elaborate distraction, as the focus ends up being on thwarting Satan instead of attending to worldly problems (the only REAL problems). All that is bad is chalked up to Satan’s sway over our souls. “Satan”, then, is simply a proxy for going against the rules. This worldview only makes sense insofar as we confuse piety for probity.}

{30 Of course, the term “devil” has taken on somewhat of a colloquial cast. What in the devil is going on here? In using such turns of phrase, we have rendered the idea into a banality. So we are not inclined to read into benign idiomatic expressions like “have a devil of a time”, “give the devil his due”, “the devil’s in the details”, “it’s the devil you know”, “playing devil’s advocate”, “devil take the hindmost”,

“devil may care”, and “speak of the devil”. Suffice to say: If you shoot at the devil, you best not miss. In navigating the vicissitudes of life, we often find ourselves between the devil and the deep blue sea.}

{31 “Dajjal” means “false”. The alternate moniker for the anti-Christ is “D’Abbatul Ard”. This nefarious character is never mentioned explicitly in the Koran. In the Haddith, he is also said to hail from the Persian city of Isfahan. There is also foretelling of the coming of the nefarious “Sufyani”: progeny of Sakhr ibn Harb, a contemporary of Mohammed who was leader of the demonized Quraysh tribe.}

{32 This moniker, coined in the 7th century, was likely a variant of the name of the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor of the time, Heraclius, who persecuted the Jews during the first three decades of that century. The reference appears in the “Seref Zerubbabel”, a work named after the 6th-century B.C. king of Judah (who ruled at the end of the Exilic Period, and purportedly initiated construction of the Second Temple). In Judaic eschatology, “Olam Ha-Ba” is a resplendently Edenic world, which will be ushered in after the apocalypse. During this era, the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie with the goat, in accordance with Isaiah 11:6.}

{33 In some cases, racism is involved in the association of darkness (with respect to skin pigmentation) with depravity. Notably, Mohammed of Mecca (the prophet of Islam) proposed that Satan resembled a sturdy black man with inflamed eyes…dark, ruddy cheeks…and long, scraggly hair. According to the biography of Ibn Ishaq, when asked what Satan looked like, the prophet pointed to an Abyssinian slave, Nabtal ibn Al-Harith, and made this declaration. Mohammed even predicted that it would be a “zanj” (black African) who would eventually destroy the Meccan cube, thereby auguring the End Days. In couching their prejudice in Abrahamic terms, racists thereafter came to ascribe to sub-Saharan Africans the mark of Cain (alt. the Curse of Ham); whereby dark skin was seen as punishment for their inherently fallen nature. This view was most infamously propounded by Mormons; and was common amongst white Christians of several denominations. After all, if god had ordained it, then their bigotry against “Kushites” could be rationalized.}

{34 This is not only how geo-political conflict escalates; it’s how most bar-fights begin. Whether the forces involved are kinetic or psychic, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. There is, then, a positive feedback loop. Reciprocated enmity invariably benefits right-wing elements on both sides of a geo-political conflict–as such parties, by their very nature, derive power (in the form of clout, as well as a veneer of legitimacy) from this charade of mutual vilification, whereby

each justifies the other's posture…exacerbating the animus. In other words: Such regimes feed off of the very enmity their ideologies fuel. Case in point: The Israeli regime vis a vis Hamas. In both cases, we find an illustration of how hostility in one direction elicits racial animus in the other–creating a vicious cycle. Tribe-based antagonism–along with the animosity that animates it–is reciprocal. Tribal demarcation invariably elicits enmity. "US as opposed to THEM" (conceptual) becomes "US opposed to THEM" (confrontational). The ensuing conflict bolsters the casus belli of those who's very raison d'etre is DEFINED BY that conflict. A downward spiral of recrimination invariably ensues. The existence of Hamas makes Revisionist Zionism stronger; the existence of Revisionist Zionism makes Hamas stronger. As the existence of each serves to justify the claims the other makes. Each camp revels in the other's existence, as it is galvanized by THE OTHER being understood as an adversary BY ITS VERY NATURE. Demonization is almost always a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hence antagonism perpetuates itself.}

Postscript: "Deus Vult"

With the imprimatur of god, anythings goes. Hence the utility of "Deus Vult" when seeking to give one's agenda veneer of legitimacy. However, WITHIN a dogmatic system, NOT anything goes. (One can select whatever one wishes to sanctify; but once the sanctification is done, the rules are set thenceforth.) Indeed, adherents to

this or that ideology are highly constrained by whatever the designated doctrine stipulates (pace the accepted scope of interpretation). Possible exegetical leeway notwithstanding, though, proselytes believe that the content is ABSOLUTE, and so could not have been other than it is.

This assumption is so embedded that its existence AS an assumption is not even noticed. Hence the decrees are taken as axiomatic; no further inquiry necessary. After all, X can't be sacrosanct if it is acknowledged as just an accident of history, or as the product of human contrivance. "Doing god's work" (DGW) undergirds many pathologies; which qualifies it as a disorder. This warrants its categorization as a kind of syndrome; though one of a peculiar kind. For it is memetic in nature.

We might bear in mind that DGW syndrome is not in itself a guarantee that one will engage in malign behavior; for the nature of the impinging doctrine is relevant. This is why, when Quakers or the Amish do everything they do because (they believe) "it is god's will", there is little worry about them engaging in hostile campaigns against those outside their circles. Hence it is not Christianity PER SE that is the problem, it is a CERTAIN KIND of Christianity that is the problem (as with Roman Catholicism during the Middle Ages or the American brand of "Dominionism" of the present day). In the same way, it is not Islam PER SE that is the problem, it is a CERTAIN KIND of Islam that is the problem (Salafism). Likewise, it is not Judaism PER SE that is to blame for the conflict in Palestine, it is a CERTAIN KIND of Judaism that is the problem (Revisionist Zionism). And so on.

Providentialism renders moral considerations null, as perspicacity is jettisoned in favor of fealty. Divine ordinance, by simply being what it is, justifies itself. It stands to reason, then, that everything is thereby framed in Manichean terms. All are expected to adhere to the sacralized program in the name of "loyalty" and tribal "honor" (that is: for the glory of the anointed tribe). To fail to toe the line is treason. To countermand the prescribed pieties is blasphemy. To question the program is heresy; an act that qualifies one as an "enemy".

Such alterity can be conjured even when no salient demarcation exists. Whether Tutsi vis a vis Hutu Rwandans…or Gheg vis a vis Tosk Albanians: same ethnicity, same religion, same language, same nationality. No matter. SOME kind of tribalism is contrived so as to vilify the other.

In the 1990's, the Serbs, harking back to their glorious victory over the dastardly Turks in 1389, were hell-bent on reclaiming Kosovo. Hence there was a fascistic Serbian regime (under Milosovic) pitted against an indigenous population vying for independence, whereby some resorted to terrorism–in the form of the Kosovar Liberation Army–in order to claim what they saw was theirs BY DIVINE RIGHT.

Such imbroglios become even more volatile with the noxious elixir of racial supremacy combined with claims of sacred ground (a tract of land to which the anointed race asserts god-given rights). In sum: Racism begets counter-racism; and the conflict is given concrete terms when "blood and sand" is involved.

In the late 1940's, the Revisionist Zionist terrorist organization was the "Irgun". Its primary adversary at the time was the BRITISH (as the British Mandate stood in the way of their designs on ethnic cleansing, and establishing a Judaic ethno-State). Amongst myriad other murderous exploits, the Irgun bombed Jerusalem's King David Hotel–killing scores of civilians, as well as numerous British officials. Of the incident, the head of the Irgun (Menachem Begin) later stated: "Historically, we were not 'terrorists'. We were, strictly speaking, ANTI-terrorists." In other words, Revisionist Zionists could engage in terrorism with impunity because they were BY DEFINITION not terrorists. They couldn't be; because they were the good guys. It was only THE OTHER that could be characterized in this mendacious manner.

Since those fateful days, there has been far more terrorism perpetrated by the Israeli government against Palestinian civilians than by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilians. Nevertheless, many in Israel (as well as many in the U.S., due to the prevalence of Revisionist Zionist propaganda) are under the distinct impression that the opposite is true. Mention the term "terrorist" with respect to Israel, and most people in these two nations will tend to think of militant Salafi fanatics ("jihadis", likely affiliated with Hamas) rather than the far more egregious perpetrator of terrorism: the Israeli government. (Hamas has committed a small fraction of the humanitarian atrocities that the Israeli government has committed. To equate ALL Palestinians with Hamas stems from an urge to met out collective punishment–as if shared culpability stemmed from shared demography.)

When Martin Luther King Jr. led protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960's, he was branded a subversive by the powers that be; NOT because he was doing anything ignoble, but because he was undermining the agenda of those in power; and bringing their official narrative (later dubbed the "Washington Consensus") into question.

Make no mistake, there is objectively-definable probity vs. iniquity. The “catch” is that these qualifications–insofar as they are objectively posited–do not necessarily accord with our own interests; are not reflected by prevailing social norms (conventional wisdom); and are not dictated by incumbent power structures. Indeed, according to the deontic moral framework proposed by Kant, an act cannot be genuinely moral UNLESS it counters one’s own interests. An act is genuinely moral only when it has no utility (or even negative utility). As the adage goes: Principles only matter when it is inconvenient to stick to them.

Probity / iniquity transcends tribal affiliation; and so often does not comport with any given tribe-centric taxonomy, or accord with tribal interests. The question becomes: Do we consider it “good” / “bad” as a function of our own interests; or do we align our interests according to what we find to be “good” / “bad”? This is a tricky matter, as the former is often perceived as the latter.