Moldbug cryptically hinted that he is going into retirement. He may contribute to unqualified reservations again sometime in the future. Or perhaps he will create a new blog where he can once again be anonymous. Or maybe he is gone for good; there is no way to tell for sure. I decided to create this copy of UR Cathedral blog posts so as to make sure they didn't get lost in the event that the blog gets shut down. This only includes UR posts that I considered to be most important in defining the cathedral on my Cathedral Compilation post, excluding "How Dawkins got pwned" and "A Gentle Introduction to Unqualified reservations". So long as Unqualified Reservations remains up, I recommend you read the posts there rather than in this PDF since you will also get to see the comments. Everything else in this PDF was written by Mencius Moldbug on the specified dates.

~Atavisionary

Mencius Moldbug, Unqualified Reservations 2007

Why do Atheists Believe in Religion? 04/25/2007

Not everyone these days believes in God. But pretty much everyone believes in religion.

By "believing in religion," I mean recognizing a significant categorical distinction between "religious" phenomena, and those that are "nonreligious" or "secular."

For example, the concepts of "freedom of religion" and "separation of church and state" are dependent on the concept of "religion." If "religion" is a noninformative, unimportant, or confusing category, these concepts must also be noninformative, unimportant, or confusing.

Since most atheists, agnostics, etc, consider the First Amendment pretty important, we can assume they "believe in religion."

My question is: why? Is this a useful belief? Does it help us understand the world? Or does it confuse or misinform us? Once again, our team of crack philosophers is on the case.

Let's rule out the possibility that "religion" is noninformative. We can define "religion" as the attribution of existence to anthropomorphic paranormal entities. This definition has its fuzzy corner cases, notably some kinds of Buddhism, but it's short and it'll do for the moment.

We are left with the question: is "religion" an important or clarifying category? Or is it unimportant and confusing?

If you believe in God, obviously you have to believe in religion. Religion is an important category because your religion is true, and all other religions are false. (As Sam Harris

puts it, "everyone's an atheist with respect to Zeus.")

For atheists of the all-around variety - including me - the question remains. Why do we believe in "religion?"

One obvious answer is that we have to share the planet with a lot of religious people. If you are an atheist, there is no getting around it: religion, as per Dawkins, is a delusion. Deluded people do crazy things and are often dangerous. We need to have a category for these people, just as we have a category for "large, man-eating carnivores." Certainly, religious violence has killed a lot more people lately than lions, tigers, or bears.

This argument sounds convincing, but it hides a fallacy.

The fallacy is that the *distinction* between "religion" and *other classes of delusion* must be clarifying or important. If there is a case for this proposition, we haven't met it yet.

Peoples' actions matter. And peoples' beliefs matter, because they motivate actions.

But actions *in the real world* must be motivated by beliefs *about the real world*. Delusions about the paranormal world are only relevant - at least to us atheists - in the special case that they motivate delusions about the real world.

So, as atheists, why should we care about the former? Why not forget about the details of metaphysical doctrine, which pertain to an ethereal plane that doesn't even exist, and concentrate our attention on beliefs about reality?

If you believe that nine Jewish virgins need to be thrown into Mt. Fuji, you are, in my opinion, deluded. Whether you believe this because you are receiving secret messages from Amaterasu Omikami, or because it's just payback for the dirty deeds of the Elders of Zion, affects neither me nor the virgins.

If you believe "partial-birth abortion" is wrong because it's "against God's law," or if you think it's just "unethical," your vote will be the same.

If you are tolerant and respectful of others because you think Allah wants you to be tolerant and respectful of others, how can I possibly have a problem with this? If you stab people in the street because you've misinterpreted Nietzsche and decided that morality is not for you, is that less of a problem?

Lots of people have delusions about the real world. People believe all kinds of crazy things for all kinds of crazy reasons. Some even believe sensible things for crazy reasons. Why should we establish a special category for delusions that are motivated by anthropomorphic paranormal forces?

A reasonable answer is: why not?

Certainly, religion is an important force in the world today. Certainly at least some forms of religion - "fundamentalist," one might say - are actively dangerous. No one is actually stabbing people in the street because of Nietzsche. The same cannot be said for Allah.

How can it possibly confuse or distract us to recognize and protect ourselves against this important class of delusion?

To see the answer, we need to break Godwin's Law.

Suppose Hitler had declared that, rather than being just some guy from Linz, he was Thor's prophet on earth. (Some people would have been positively delighted by this.) Suppose that everything the Nazis did was done in the name of Thor. Suppose, in other words, that Nazism was in the category "religion."

This is by no means a new idea. Many writers, including Eric Voegelin, Eric Hoffer, Victor Klemperer, Michael Burleigh, etc, etc, have described the similarities between Nazism and religions. But Nazism does not fit our definition of religion above - no paranormal entities. This is the definition most people use, so most people don't think of Nazism as a religion.

The Allies invaded Nazi Germany and completely suppressed Nazism. To this day in Germany it is illegal to teach National Socialism. I think most Americans, and most Germans, would agree that this is a good thing.

But if we make this one trivial change, turning Nazism into Thorism and making it a "religion," which as we've seen need not change the magnitude or details of Nazi crimes at all, the acts of the Allies are a blatant act of religious intolerance.

Aren't we supposed to respect other faiths? Shouldn't we at least have restricted our unfriendly attentions to "fundamentalist Nazism," and promoted a more "moderate" version of the creed? Suppose we gave the Taliban the same treatment? What, exactly, is the difference between Eisenhower's policy and Ann Coulter's?

It gets worse. Another one of Voegelin's "political religions," which by our definition are not religions at all (no anthropomorphic paranormal entities) is Marxism. Let's tweak Marxism slightly and assert that the writings of Marx were divinely inspired, leaving everything else in the history of Communism unchanged.

Marxism, unlike Nazism, is still very popular in the world today. A substantial fraction of the professors in Western universities are either Marxists, or strongly influenced by Marxist thought. Nor are these beliefs passive - many fields that are actively taught and quite popular, such as postcolonial studies, seem largely or entirely Marxist in content.

This is certainly not true of Nazism. It is also not true of Christianity or any other "religion" proper. Many professors are Christians, true, and some are even fundamentalists. But the US educational system is quite sensitive to the possibility that it

might be indoctrinating youth with Christian fundamentalism. "Creation science," for example, is not taught in any mainstream university and seems unlikely to achieve that status.

If Marxism was a religion, Marxist economics would come pretty close to being the exact equivalent of "intelligent design." But, again, Marxism as religion and Marxism as non-religion involve exactly the same set of delusions about the real world. (Of course, to a Marxist, they are not delusions.)

Should non-Marxist atheists, such as myself, be as concerned about separating Marxism from state-supported education as we are with Christianity? If Marxism is a religion, or if the difference between Marxism as it is in the real world and the version in which Marx was a prophet is insignificant, our "wall of separation" is a torn-up chainlink fence.

But there was a period in which Americans tried to eradicate Marxism the way they fight against "intelligent design" today. It was called McCarthyism. And believers in civil liberties were on exactly the opposite side of the barricades.

As non-Marxist atheists, do we want McCarthy 2.0? Should loyalty oaths be hip this year? Should we schedule new hearings?

This is why the concept of "religion" is harmful. If trivial changes to hypothetical history convert reasonable policies into monstrous injustices, or vice versa, your perception of reality cannot be correct. You have been infected by a toxic meme.

If memes are analogous to parasitic organisms, believing in "religion" is like taking a narrow-spectrum antibiotic on an irregular schedule. The Dawkins treatment - our latest version of what used to be called anticlericalism - wipes out a colony of susceptible bacteria which have spent a long time learning to coexist reasonably, if imperfectly, with the host. And clears the field for an entirely different phylum of bugs which are unaffected by antireligious therapy. Whose growth, in fact, it may even stimulate.

In the last two centuries, "political religions" have caused far, far more morbidity than "religious religions." But here we are with Dawkins, Harris, and Dennett - still popping the penicillin. Hm. Kind of makes you think, doesn't it?

(Update: before commenting on this post, please see my new comments policy.)

Terminology and an Open Floor 04/29/2007

The other day I tried to design a paranormal-independent terminology for talking about the phenomenon we call "religion." I suggested calling a received belief system a "kernel" and an institution that transmits received beliefs a "monitor."

On further reflection I don't like "monitor." Too many things are called monitors. (In case

anyone cares, what I meant was not the square thing that sits on your desk and shows you my blog, but a [virtual machine](#) monitor - an ancient, rather mainframey terminology.) But I'd rather go with a hardware analogy - "repeater." (See the [Wik](#).)

If any of my readers (perhaps two or three have stuck around after the Andrewlanche) has any better suggestions, I am certainly open to them. (Unqualified Reservations is not a mere outlet for my deranged, extremist rants. It is a *community* of *individuals* whose *goal* is to *learn, grow, and change together*. Please let me know if I'm layin' it on too thick.)

So a religion is a kernel, and a church is a repeater. But not all kernels are religions, and not all repeaters are churches.

The interesting question then becomes: how do we separate repeater and state?

The floor is open for your comments. Also, in case you have any large chunks of text from obscure Eastern European novels to paste into the window, this is not only allowed, it is encouraged.

[Two kinds of repeaters](#) 5/5/2007

A [little while ago](#) I noted that beliefs about the paranormal world can't directly motivate actions in the physical world. The proximate motivation of any physical action must be some belief about the real world, because (pace [Mises](#)) any action implies some attempt to change the world's state to one the actor considers preferable. So real-world principles which depend on the paranormal, such as "separation of church and state," are suboptimal by definition. Any real-world problems they could prevent could be also caused by a nonparanormal belief system, against which such a rule is no defense.

For example, if two movements A and B propagate the same beliefs about the real world, but A includes a paranormal plane whereas B does not, "separation of church and state" will protect us against A but not B. This is what in my line of work we call a "security hole."

The general approach when you find a security hole is to (a) fix it, and (b) figure out what-all has crawled through the hole. This is going to require more than one blog post, but we might as well start on (a).

The only way (that I know of) to repair such a mental lacuna is to rebuild the language we use to think about the problem. As long as we have to change linguistic gears to compare paranormal and nonparanormal belief systems, we will have a vulnerability, because this irrelevant categorization constantly tempts us to craft overspecified tests which a mutating attacker can evade.

(For example, a rule that tells us to "keep Mithra out of the schools" is overspecified, unless you think Mithra in specific is the great danger to impressionable young minds. If we keep Mithra out of the schools but we say nothing about Baal, Baal will outcompete

Mithra and our children will grow up as Baalist bots. Of course, if Baal is real and all the bad news we read in the paper is caused by our failure to sacrifice to him, this is ideal.)

So I suggested the terms "kernel" and "repeater," defining a kernel as a set of factual and ethical assertions about the real world, and a repeater as an institution that propagates such assertions. A religion is a kernel and a church is a repeater. But not all kernels are religions, nor repeaters churches.

Let's extend the "kernel" concept slightly, to also include metaphysical assertions. A metaphysical assertion is any statement that makes no factual or ethical claim (Hume's "is" or "ought") about the real world. This includes beliefs about paranormal entities, such as gods, but it also includes hermetic philosophical concepts such as those in Neoplatonism, Buddhism, Hegelism, etc, etc.

By definition, metaphysics does not directly affect reality. But since metaphysical assertions are often sources of conflict, and since they can motivate beliefs about the real world, it can be useful to track them - as long as we remember that they are pathologically neutral, and eliminating metaphysics, while it may be desirable, cannot by itself eliminate factual errors or ethical disagreements.

Your kernel is the set of assertions you agree with. In theory, since no one can physically stop you from thinking for yourself, everyone could have a different kernel. But in practice, people are social animals, they get most of their assertions from others, and their kernels cluster.

Therefore, we can speak of "prototype" kernels, implying patterns of agreement across social groups. Methodism, for example, is a "prototype" under this definition. Not all Methodists agree on all assertions factual, ethical, or metaphysical, but there is clearly a general pattern of consensus.

These patterns correspond to the networks by which assertions are transmitted between individuals. Let's call a assertion in transmission a "packet." If you "accept" the packet, it means you agree with the assertion. If you "reject" it, you don't.

(There's another word that means "transmitted belief." I've made up my mind about this word: I don't like it. Mainly because it makes me sound like a dork. The mere auditory tone of the word, its mouth-feel, is awful, and its various declensions (such as "memeplex") are even worse. But "meme" also implies a sort of scientistic pretense that I find unwholesome, an attempt to intimidate the reader through the bogus authority of jargon. I prefer to borrow words from the computer business specifically because I think of programming as a trade, not a science.)

So a "repeater" is an institution which sends packets. A "church," in the Christian sense of the word, is a repeater because the point of going to church is that the minister, or other religious official, tells you what he or she is thinking - with the implication that you should share these thoughts. If you are a churchgoer and you find yourself frequently

rejecting the church's packets, you're likely to switch churches.

We can call the people who generally accept the packets produced by some repeater its "clients." There is obviously a trust relationship from client to repeater. If you feel the need to evaluate every packet you receive from scratch, you have no need for a repeater.

Another example of a repeater is Wikipedia. I certainly don't trust Wikipedia absolutely, any more than I think most churchgoers trust their ministers absolutely. However, I do assign more credibility to articles produced by the Wikipedia editing process than to, say, some random blog.

Finally, to finish off this terminology-fest, we need to wade into the deep end of the swamp and come up with some way of defining "good" or "bad" assertions, and hence packets - so that we can actually turn our firewall back on.

Metaphysical assertions, again, are neither bad nor good, as they do not reflect on the real world. This leaves us with only factual and ethical assertions. Let's say that an assertion is good unless it's bad. This leaves us with the problem of defining bad facts and bad ethics. The word "bad" is a little coarse for my taste, so let's say "toxic" instead.

A toxic factual assertion is a *misperception of reality*. For example, I think Holocaust revisionism is a toxic assertion, because the Holocaust strikes me as pretty well-documented. But I prefer to avoid the word "lie," because I don't and can't know the motives of those who repeat this (or any other) packet.

A toxic ethical assertion is an *internal inconsistency*. For example, in the American South from the 1830s to the 1860s, the idea developed that enslaving Africans was compatible with Christianity. This assertion would have struck even the grandparents of those who held it as toxic, because human equality has always been a central concern of Christianity. At the time of the Revolution those who accepted slavery generally thought of it as an inescapable evil. (Slavery is mentioned in the Bible, but the system of slavery in the classical world was very different from that practiced in the South, nor were Southerners unaware of this.) If Southerners had rejected Christianity in favor of some more Nietzschean ethical kernel, as at least some National Socialists did, they could have avoided inconsistency. Their ethics would not have been compatible with mine, or probably with yours, but they would not be "toxic" by this definition.

Toxic packets (which carry toxic assertions) are really not that hard to detect. Epistemology and ethics are not rocket science. Given that we live in the 21st century and we generally seem pretty good about getting our rockets into orbit, the persistence of toxic assertions is hard to explain.

But persist they do. The clients of Daily Kos and Free Republic - to name a couple of the Internet's more egregious repeaters - can't possibly both be right. Their ethics could differ without toxicity, but my guess is that if you polled readers of each for a statement of general ethical principles, what you would get on both sides would be pretty familiar, and

probably more or less compatible with the broad tradition of Christianity. Certainly, either or both of the prototype kernels these sites offer must contain ethical inconsistencies and/or misperceptions of reality.

So toxic packets are flying all around us. Why?

This one is already getting long. But there's one way to classify repeaters that may provide one clue. We can divide repeaters into "disinterested" and "concerned" classes.

A disinterested repeater has no organizational motivation to repeat anything but what its clients want to hear. It has the same relationship to them as any business to its customers. If its clients want the truth, it will try to give them the truth. If they prefer nonsense and illusion, that's what they'll get. The success of a disinterested repeater depends only on the popularity of the prototype kernel it delivers its clients, not on the actual content.

A concerned repeater has some reason to care what its clients think. It has ulterior motives. The success of a concerned repeater will depend on the nature of the assertions it makes. There is some external force, not related to the preferences of its clients, that rewards the repeater for propagating certain assertions and/or deters it from propagating others.

Which is better? And why? Hm...

The Castes of the United States 5/6/2007

It's always fun to rethink the world by redefining our terminology. But the brain can only stand so much of this. The cerebrum boils, releasing green gas. The cortex starts to blacken and fray. A shocking, foreign pain arises between the ears. It will not go away.

So it's a relief when there's a backup word, which already has exactly the right meaning, but is disused and carries no (or at least few) political and emotional associations. This word is "caste." The word it replaces is so encrusted in historical nonsense that I won't even say it.

Of course the word "caste" is generally associated with India. The US is not India. So if we meant "caste" in the precise Hindu sense of the word (varna), there are no castes in the US, except perhaps among some Indian immigrants.

Some redefinition, therefore, is necessary. Let's define a "caste" as a social group with its own internal status system. All hominids crave status and will exchange almost anything for it, but different castes assign status in very different ways - as we'll see.

Here's my taxonomy of American castes. I've picked names from various historical cultures, hopefully without strong emotional associations for modern readers, for these castes. The implicit analogies these names create should be roughly accurate, but

certainly not precise. I have ordered them alphabetically to avoid any implicit ranking.

In the *Brahmin* caste, status among both men and women is defined by scholarly achievement, success in an intellectual profession, or position of civic responsibility. The highest-status *Brahmins* are artists and scientists, but *Brahmins* can also be doctors or lawyers, although it is much better to be a doctor than a lawyer, and much better to be a lawyer than a dentist (a trade which was perhaps once *Brahmin*, but is now definitely *Vaisya*). Ideally, as a *Brahmin*, if you are a doctor you should be primarily concerned with caring for the poor; if you are a lawyer, your practice should focus on civil liberties and social justice - cardiology and corporate law are slightly *de trop*. An increasing number of young *Brahmins* consider themselves "activists" and work for "nonprofits" or "NGOs," lending some credence to the theory that the *Brahmins* are our ruling or governing caste. Entry into the *Brahmin* caste is conferred almost entirely by first-tier university admissions, although getting into Harvard doesn't mean you don't still need to make something of yourself.

In the *Dalit* caste, status among men is defined by power, wealth and sexual success, among women by attractiveness and popularity. The favored occupation of *Dalit* men is crime, preferably of the organized variety. However, *Dalit* criminals are not generally psychopathic; they perceive crime as guerrilla warfare against an unjust society. *Dalit* women may support themselves by crime, welfare (which they consider a right), or payments from men. Both male and female *Dalits* may occasionally support themselves by conventional employment, but this is usually in jobs that other castes (except *Helots*) would consider demeaning, and *Dalits* share this association. The *Dalit* caste is not monolithic; it is divided into a number of ethnic subcastes, such as African-American, Mexican, etc. A few white *Dalits* exist, notably in the Appalachians. There is little or no solidarity between the various *Dalit* ethnicities.

The *Helot* caste is an imported peasant caste, originating primarily in rural Central America. Status among *Helot* men is conferred primarily by hard work, money and power. Status among *Helot* women is conferred by attractiveness, motherhood, and association with successful men. The *Helot* value system does not seem to be sustainable in the US, and the children of *Helots* tend to grow up as *Dalits*. New *Helots*, however, can always be imported to replace them.

The *Optimate* caste has to be mentioned, because it was until quite recently the US's ruling caste. It is not clear, however, that the *Optimate* value system still exists in any meaningful sense, and if it does it is decaying rapidly, with most young *Optimates* becoming *Brahmins*. However, status among any men and women who do still follow the *Optimate* way is conferred by birth, breeding and personal character, with wealth serving as a prerequisite but not a mark of actual distinction. The Bible of the *Optimate* caste is, of course, the Social Register.

The *Vaisya* caste is the most difficult to define. It's tempting to say that a *Vaisya* is anyone who is not a *Brahmin*, *Dalit*, *Helot* or *Optimate*. Status among *Vaisya* men is conferred by productive employment, generally defined in monetary terms; by a

successful family life; and by participation in church or other formal social groups. Status among *Vaisya* women is conferred by attractiveness, motherhood, and social participation, with an increasing number of *Vaisya* women entering the labor force, typically in unintellectual white-collar jobs.

(**Update**: please see the comment by "smb," whose perspective of the present-day *Optimate* caste is much sharper and clearer than my definition - which on reflection is too antiquated.)

[Idealism is Not Great](#) 05/14/2007

I have a standing offer of a bottle of Laphroaig for anyone who can supply me with an objective and nontrivial explanation of any distinction between the nouns *idealist* and *ideologue* as used in the contemporary English language.

Explaining that *conservative ideologues* are a dime a dozen, as are *progressive idealists,* but there are somewhat fewer *progressive ideologues* and it is almost impossible to find a *conservative idealist* even when you really need one, will not get you the whisky.

However, there's another meaning of *idealist* in English - a historical one. *Idealism* is actually a philosophical school. Or rather a number of philosophical schools. I find the term most useful as it pertains to the line from [Plato](#) to [Hegel](#) to [Emerson](#) to [Dewey](#). (It sometimes helps if you think of them as evil kung-fu masters.)

Let's capitalize the word Idealist in this sense, so that we know we don't just mean a nice person who thinks the world could be improved.

An Idealist is a person who believes that *universals exist independently*. Specifically, in the modern sense, your Idealist believes in concepts such as *Democracy*, the *Environment*, *Peace*, *Freedom*, *Human Rights*, *Equality*, *Justice*, etc, etc.

What do these concepts have in common? One, they have universally positive associations. In fact they have no meaning without these associations. A statement such as "the *Environment* is evil" or "we must work together against the *Environment*" is simply not well-formed. It is the equivalent of Chomsky's "colorful green ideas sleep furiously."

Two, they are impossible to define precisely. It's fairly clear that they have no meaning at all.

For example, John Rawls wrote a whole book called [A Theory Of Justice](#) which purports to be a rigorous rational derivation of the New Deal regime. The fact that this work appeared in the 1970s, whereas the coup it exists to excuse occurred in the 1930s, should clue you in to the difficulty of Rawls' masterful performance. Of course, the *Justice* that Rawls so elaborately elucidates has nothing at all to do with the original English meaning

of the word *justice* or its Latin basis, that is, the accurate application of the law. Rawls' ideal is probably best given in pre-Rawlsian English as *Righteousness*.

But it would be rather hard to call a book *A Theory Of Righteousness* without provoking at least a snicker or two. We all know there is no objective definition of *Righteousness*. And in fact, if anyone can go through the Federal Register with a red pen and explain which of these wonderful regulations are and are not *Just*, according to Rawls' "theory," he or she may earn that bottle of Laphroaig after all. (Just a page or two will do - to demonstrate the method.)

The case of the *Environment* is similar. We all know sort of what the *Environment* is supposed to be. But as with *Justice*, we don't have anything like a precise, objectively applicable rule for defining whether some action is *good* or *bad* for the *Environment*. For example, if we sell Golden Gate Park to Halliburton, as a combination condo subdivision and oil-services theme park, and give the resulting ninety billion dollars to the Wilderness Society so they can buy the entire island of Borneo and preserve it as orangutan habitat forever, is this *good* or *bad* for the *Environment*? Discuss.

This bizarre system of thought, which I hear may actually earn a mention in the DSM-V, is also entirely incapable of advising us on what to do when these ideals *conflict*. For example, suppose some action improves the *Environment*, but diminishes *Justice*? Or vice versa? Is this a good action, or a bad action? Discuss.

Idealists also recognize what might be called *anti-ideals*. These are just like the above ideals, except that instead of being good, they are actually bad. They have names like *Violence*, *Inequality*, *Racism*, and so on. One interesting quirk of Idealistic thinking, is that while ideals are typically used only as objects in the strange sentences these people form - such as "we must preserve the *Environment*" - the anti-ideals can be subjects, such as "*Violence* killed thirteen people in Iraq on Sunday." Apparently this sort of universal not only exists independently, but buys explosives and plants them in dead goats - a remarkable feat for any concept.

A little while ago I explained that *religion*, if we define it as a system of belief involving anthropomorphic paranormal entities, cannot directly affect reality. A belief about the paranormal world can be the ultimate motivation for an action in the real world, but it cannot be the proximate motivation for an action in the real world.

A long string of recent books, by very distinguished thinkers such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett, have informed us that *religion* is, basically, evil. That is, that the optimal level of *religion* in society is like the optimal level of mercury in your milk: zero. Since I have no beliefs about the paranormal plane myself, I am naturally quite sympathetic to these volumes.

However, consider the form of such a book. Typically it is a list of great historical crimes, together with explanations of how *religion* was the ultimate cause of such and such a crime.

Naturally after reading such a book, one feels slightly jaundiced toward *religion*. But of course an argument of this sort, even if all of its history is perfectly correct (which it usually is), goes nowhere at all toward convincing any reasonable person that *religion* is some unique peril.

For example, one could assemble a similar book consisting entirely of crimes committed by Jews. Or Norwegians, or Inuit, or Buddhists, or brown-haired people, or any nontrivial set of humans past and present. Even if such a text made no connection at all between the Inuit upbringing of the criminals it rightly condemned, and the fact that their victims were so often found with gaping harpoon wounds, the reader would probably infer one, and come to the conclusion that these Inuit criminals should have their children confiscated and sent to special educational centers where they learn only love for the walrus and for the whale.

The inductive method, in other words, is simply not applicable to the task of discovering essential criminality in philosophies or traditions.

But since philosophies and traditions, whatever their criminal or non-criminal nature, do seem to have a suspicious involvement in the tremendous mayhem of history, perhaps it's worth looking around for another culprit.

My hypothesis, which any brave commenter is welcome to take a whack at, is that whether or not *religion* is the ultimate cause, the proximate cause of mayhem is generally Idealism. That is, when there is a problem with *religion*, in general the way the problem happens is that *religion* leads to Idealism, and Idealism leads to mayhem.

But since Idealism is perfectly capable of existing without *religion* - since, for example, most of your recent mayhem has been the result of nontheistic Idealist movements such as National Socialism and Marxist-Leninism - perhaps Messrs. Dawkins, Hitchens, etc, with all due respect, are chasing the tail and ignoring the dog.

In fact, if the type of Idealism that is caused by *religion* is actually milder and less murderous than the nontheistic variants - a hypothesis that's not at all improbable, considering modern history - attenuating *religion* may actually *promote* mayhem.

(Obviously this is a desperate plea for Andrew Sullivan to link to me again.)

Perhaps this week we'll look a little more closely at some of these murderous Idealisms...

Our Planet is Infested by Pseudo-Atheists 5/16/2007

The other day I defined Idealism as belief in mysterious universals. I noted that while this pernicious trait appears both in "religious" (paranormal) and "secular" (nonparanormal) belief systems, these days it's much more common in the latter. And I suggested that this

may have something to do with the monstrous violence of the Enlightenment era.

For example, there is no way to distinguish someone who worships the *Environment* from someone who venerates the Great God *Pan*. In the real world the two will act identically.

Indeed, it's easier to reason with the *Pan*-worshipper. When he tells you that he needs to save the rainforest because the rainforest is sacred to *Pan*, the conversation (to a *Pan*-skeptic such as myself) is over. Both sides can see that there is no common point of reference, and the two of you can start working out how to agree to disagree.

Whereas when the *Environment*-worshipper tells you about the biodiversity of the rainforest, she has created an endless hairball of arguments which trail off into nonsense everywhere. What, exactly, is "biodiversity," and why is it important? What does "lungs of the planet" mean? Does the planet have a liver, too, and if so where is it? Idealism without holy books is a permanent fountain of conversation, a goldmine for the sophist caste.

The danger of Idealism is that it is a form of *rationalism*. Rationalism is the assertion that one's received beliefs are products of pure reason. In fact, rationalism is to reason as scientism is to science. Here at UR we believe in reason, too, but we like to work our beliefs out for themselves. Regular readers may have noticed that we've been getting very different results.

My stance on the world should be pretty clear by now. I think the West's replacement of Christianity with Idealism was a disaster. (In fact, since the roots of Idealism in Protestant Christianity are so clear - ideals such as *Democracy* and *Equality* simply reek of pure Jesus - it's arguable that Idealism is simply a fanatical strain of nontheistic Christianity. But the idea of nontheistic Christianity is hard for people to swallow and it at least deserves its own post.)

In any case, it's clear that most people who describe themselves as nonbelievers are in fact Idealists, often quite fanatical ones. Our planet is infested with pseudo-atheists. It's horrible.

Most of the people who understand that we live in the Idealist equivalent of a theocracy - an *ideocracy*, perhaps - are "paleoconservatives." And their intellectual recovery program tends to include a return to pre-Idealist Christianity. Two very perceptive paleos are [Larry Auster](#) and [Daniel Larison](#), both of whose blogs I read every day.

Perhaps they'd be horrified to hear it, but there's a certain Voltairean flavor to the work of both these writers. As with most paleos, their writing is just refreshing. Every day, some bloated balloon of Idealistic cant floats in and yields its musty guts to the clear, sharp pen. These gentlemen are the new *philosophes*, and I'm sure history will treat them as such.

Unfortunately, I am not a Christian. I have no faith. I simply don't see any reason to believe in the paranormal. And while I think the West would be a much better place if it

returned to traditionalist Christianity, I don't think this can happen spontaneously and I don't think it can be done by force. Nor do I see any other possibilities.

Christianity is either (a) true or (b) untrue. There is no (c). Since I believe it is (b), a return to traditionalist Christianity from universalist Idealism (what Auster calls "liberalism") is not, in my opinion, a case of truth outcompeting fiction.

Certainly one fiction can outcompete another. Public opinion is at root a matter of fashion. The world contains both fashionable fictions and unfashionable ones. The problem is that, at present, all the fashionable people in the world (except for Taki) are Idealists, and a very large percentage of the unfashionable ones are traditionalists.

I find it simply impossible to imagine any reversal in this pattern, at least until traditionalist Christianity has been entirely or almost entirely extirpated by the Idealists. This looks like it will take at least another forty or fifty years. And at this point, what does traditionalism even mean? It becomes an invention, a fake, the equivalent of Ossian or Kwanzaa.

I will pass over the revolting idea of reimposing Christianity by force. I'm sure it would work, in a sense, because (contrary to Idealist doctrine) people can in fact be conquered and indoctrinated. But I don't believe there's a paleoconservative on earth who would endorse it, even if they could imagine a way of making it happen.

Paleoconservatism, in my opinion, is a tactical dead end in the struggle against Idealist rule. It seems promising, because it seems to offer a large body of supporters - traditionalist Christians - who are relatively uncontaminated by Idealist propaganda, and many of whom are hopping up and down with rage at the various insanities, absurdities and atrocities they see perpetrated with such blithe self-confidence by the Idealist fanatics who run the world. But the actual power of this power base has been diminishing for the last 250 years, and no one has managed to do anything useful with it for at least the last 100. Ought is not the same as is.

This is why I prefer the Voltaire angle. I will do my damnedest to pop any balloon, Idealist or Christian. I am an equal-opportunity pin. It so happens that, contrary to the river of insane paranoia which the Idealist press constantly pumps into our eyeballs, almost all real power in the world is held by Idealists. So the really fat, juicy balloons are the Idealist ones. But I hope my readers, all three of them, will not mistake this for some deference to Christianity.

To me, the best scenario for getting rid of Idealism is one in which, as has happened many times in history both distant and recent, smart young people realize that their elders are pumping them full of premasticated tripe. I think the West needs an Orange Revolution. Therefore, the cultural trend I find most hopeful is the appearance of youth-oriented and thoroughly fashionable outlets, such as VICE and the eXile, which seem to have less of an investment in Idealism than, say, Vanity Fair.

Perhaps someone can correct me, but I have no hesitation at all in saying that VICE is hipper than Vanity Fair. Vanity Fair, however, is definitely hipper than VDare (which so far as I know has never published any "Whore-R Stories"). Thus my reasoning on tactics. If any paleos care to correct my misconceptions, the comments section is open.

One reader, George Weinberg, who has contributed many thoughtful comments to UR and hopefully will contribute many more, suggests that non-Idealism is too close to nihilism for his comfort. ("We are nihilists! We believe in nothing!")

I disagree. To me non-Idealism is nothing more than atheism, properly applied. It's my personal reaction to Chesterton's remarkable observation that when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything. I agree with this observation - it matches my own. But I just think it takes work and attention to really "believe in nothing," to be a reasonable person rather than a rationalist Idealist.

To me "nihilism" implies amorality. And morality is at bottom an emotional reaction. It is not a tradition. It is an aspect of human biology. I cannot think of any human culture that has actually been amoral or antimoral - the most murderous tend to be those that spend the most time obsessing about right and wrong. Therefore, I see *Nihilism* as just another anti-Ideal, a universal that can't be defined because it cannot exist in reality. In other words, it's an imaginary threat that seems suspiciously well-adapted to herd us back toward Idealism.

While I certainly would not endorse the entire *oeuvre* of David Stove - in particular, I can't make head or tail of his anti-Darwinism - his famous piece What Is Wrong With Our Thoughts does a great job of making the case against Idealism. I'd certainly say non-Idealism is a form of the neo-positivism Stove presents in this cute little rant.

To me, what's so unfortunate about our contemporary version of Idealism is that it's an almost perfect replacement for actual thought.

Modern society is awesomely complex, but not entirely without structure and form. History is not deterministic, but it exhibits recurrent patterns. Classifying these patterns, understanding the flow of cause and effect, distinguishing between vicious and virtuous cycles, is a fascinating, difficult, and (to me, at least) endlessly entertaining task.

In the place of this task, Idealism gives us cant. Its little shrieking lizard-monkey leaps up and tells us that *Democracy* and the *Environment* are good, *Inequality* and *Racism* are bad. It sometimes even finds ways of purveying this cant that pass, at least to their authors, as humor. The entire Idealist blogosphere considers itself hilarious. It also thinks of itself as the true and only successor to Rabelais, Voltaire and Mark Twain. It's all very depressing.

What's a non-Idealist to do? I mean, of course, besides shaving your head, selling your possessions and coming to live on my paramilitary literary commune, where the food is the only thing more boring than the incessant calisthenics, sonnet drills and rifle practice.

Lately I've been making the case that the modern world has largely replaced "religion," defined as the veneration of paranormal beings, with idealism, defined as the veneration of mysterious universal principles.

While I am not a paranormalist, I see this change as almost entirely pernicious. Gods, goddesses, saints and such tend to come with holy books and sacred myths. So religions, while they do of course change, have a certain stability - think of them as DNA viruses. Idealisms are more like RNA viruses. Idealists are constantly creating new universals and mutating the existing ones, often in the weirdest and most surprising ways.

In my [last post](#) on the subject I referred to our present official idealism as, simply, Idealism. But of course we have a specific set of ideals that we venerate - *Democracy*, *Equality*, and so on. (I think italicizing these words is a good way to underscore their murky, ill-defined nature.)

So it's probably best to pick a specific name for this faith. When naming other peoples' beliefs - which is often necessary, as people tend to believe their beliefs are simply the truth - it's a good idea to pick words that they consider complimentary, certainly not pejorative. I think a good name in this spirit is *Progressive Idealism*. Certainly it's hard to imagine any officer of the [Polygon](#) taking umbrage at the epithet "progressive idealist."

Okay. So the planet is a one-party state ruled by the PIs. Progressive Idealism is of course the idealism of the Allies of World War II, and the faith of today's [Brahmin](#) caste. What we know as politics is mere squabbling between Progressive-Idealist factions. Even Communism is probably best understood as a PI splinter group. Like all good parties the Progressive Idealists have a color, and that color is gray. There are no red states or blue states. There are only pinkish and bluish grays. Moreover, Progressive Idealism is a nontheistic branch of Christianity, specifically its Unitarian (American) and Nonconformist (British) sects, both of course dating back to the Puritans, who were the first to construct the integrated political, educational and religious system whose much-improved descendant now holds Planet Three in its icy, inexorable grip.

So what's the good news?

The good news is that we actually could have done a lot worse. Progressive Idealism was by no means the only idealism contending for power in the last century.

Perhaps it's just me, but I have trouble seeing how anyone can not be fascinated by the Third Reich. National Socialism developed in the most civilized country in the world, and at least before the war its popularity there was overwhelming. And its failure to dominate the planet, or at least Europe, was the result of a few military mistakes that easily could have gone the other way.

I find it extremely easy, in fact, to imagine an alternate Nazi 2007. I don't even imagine it as a Gestapo-dominated paranoid hell. Much of our historical memory of the Third Reich is, quite understandably, a memory of wartime Nazism. But if the war had gone the other way, this would be a memory of the wartime Allies, hardly a pretty picture either. Hitlerism no doubt would have moderated over time, as Stalinism and Maoism did.

For me the best way to understand National Socialism is, again, as a kind of Idealism. Instead of Progressive ideals such as *Democracy*, *Equality*, and *Humanity*, the Nazis venerated ideals such as *Courage*, *Loyalty*, and *Aryanity* (if we can use the word).

One interesting case of an ideal shared by both the 1930s Nazis and the 2007 Progressives is the *Environment*. Nazi environmentalism was definitely a different thing from ours, but the family resemblance is clear, and although environmentalism was hardly the most important part of the Nazi program it perhaps provides a window into their worldview.

A name for Nazi idealism that's independent of the specific organization might be *Aryanism*. The "Aryan race" is certainly an Ideal by my definition - an undefinable universal - because human biodiversity is clinal. And in fact the Nazis struggled mightily for a definition of "Aryan" that made any sense at all, without success. Nor, even if Nazi anthropology somehow could be persuaded to cohere, is there any way to derive such concepts as "Aryan" or "German" science or art from the whole weird mirage.

For me, the simplest way to understand the Nazi conscience is to see that Germans in the Third Reich were concerned about the *Volk* in almost exactly the same way their grandchildren are concerned about the *Environment*. Both Aryanism and Environmentalism have deep roots in the human instinct for cleanliness and purity. Once the ideal of the *Deutsche Volk* as a universal coheres in your mind, it's very easy to see how important it is to work for the future of the *Volk*, expel contaminants, and so on.

Aryanism is also more closely related to *Equality* than most of us would like to admit. German society before World War I was very hierarchical and aristocratic, at least by today's standard. The alliance of Hindenburg and Hitler, the field marshal and the corporal, was something new. Nazism was a lower-middle-class movement, Vaisya to the core. It certainly did not believe that all humans were equal. But it did believe that all *Germans* were equal. This was a revolutionary idea, and it gave Nazism quite a bit of its demonic energy.

In our Progressive-Idealist world, Aryanism is about as unfashionable as it gets. The only people who openly espouse it are criminal gangs. So it's very difficult to imagine a civilized society in which Aryanism is fashionable, exactly as Environmentalism is in our world. But of course, in 1930s Germany, so it was.

This is why Nazism still strikes us with a special horror, unlike Communism, despite the fact that Communism killed far more people. It is simply more alien and more

unfashionable. Ultimately, Communism was if not a branch a close relative of Progressive Idealism, an estranged family member, misguided but "well-intentioned." Nazism was a true enemy, defined very much as a reaction to the Progressive victory of the Great War.

It's also important to remember that the mass murder of the Jews was not, by any means, a mainstream element of 1930s Aryanism. The peacetime Nazi program was to expel them, confiscating their property, which was thought in the usual undefined way to have been unfairly cheated from the German people. Therefore, the fact that most Germans supported the Nazis does not make them in any way complicit in the Holocaust (and still less their descendants). The Holocaust, a secret military operation, was the act of the people who planned and executed it.

Is it so impossible to imagine Environmentalism being used as the basis for mass murder? Our ideals of *Humanity* and the *Environment* coexist uneasily, to say the least. Today's PIs have no trouble seeing themselves as both humanist and environmentalist. There is no need for this to make any sense - Idealism never has to make sense. But perhaps future historians will regard it as a bizarre and inexplicable juxtaposition.

Five Ways to Classify Belief Systems 05/28/2007

I use the word *kernel* to mean "belief system." Kernels, like Gaul, are divided into three parts: assertions about the real world (Hume's "is"), moral judgments about the real world (Hume's "ought"), and paranormal or other metaphysical propositions (such as David Stove's wonderful ruminations on the number 3).

Everyone, no matter how smart or stupid, has exactly one kernel. However, kernels are not assigned randomly, as if in some weird Buddhist boot process. For example, your kernel is likely to show similarities to that of your parents, friends, teachers, karate masters, favorite anchormen, etc, etc.

Let's call a kernel pattern which many people share a *prototype*. Methodism, environmentalism, firearms practice, snake handling and Burning Man attendance are all prototypes. While there are few Methodist environmentalists who are also snake-handling marksmen and never miss a burn, various subcombinations are not uncommon.

In general we are most interested in *complete* prototypes, that is, kernel patterns that are broad enough to serve as identities. It is common to describe someone as "a Methodist," or (not quite in the same way) as "an environmentalist." People who match the other prototypes above may use nouns for themselves, but they're must less likely to be described or introduced as such. An incomplete prototype simply says less about you. For example, many snake handlers are also committed peace activists who drive Range Rovers and shop at Pottery Barn.

Two common examples of a complete prototype are *religions*, which involve convictions

about one or more anthropomorphic paranormal entities, and *idealisms*, which involve convictions about one or more undefined universals, or *ideals*.

Many people consider the distinction between religion and idealism important and/or interesting, but here at UR we don't much care for it, since only metaphysical propositions can distinguish the two. You can go from religion to idealism and back simply by adding and subtracting gods, angels, demons, saints, ghosts, etc. I personally have slain many ghosts and quite a few demons, and I once kidnapped an angel and forced her at swordpoint to lead me to the altar of Thoth, where I sacrificed her for 20,000 experience points, permanent immunity to fire, and an alignment change to chaotic evil. However, this was not in real life. And even in D&D, I've never had the misfortune to encounter a god.

Therefore, we'll just use the word *prototype* to mean either religion or idealism. Of course one can study either forever. In fact, most scholars in history have spent most of their time investigating the twisty little passages, all alike, of one single prototype. However, since here at UR we are generalists, not Irish monks, Talmudic scribes or Koranic talibs, we will try and work a little more broadly.

Before you can really think about prototypes, you have to be able to name and classify them. One obvious analogy is the study of languages, which are transmitted from person to person in a vaguely similar way. Prototype transmission really has nothing in common with language transmission, but the metaproblems are the same: what does it mean to say, "X descends from Y?" Is a classification tree a tree, or a directed acyclic graph? Is variation continuous, or discrete? Etc, etc, etc.

Probably readers can add a few, but I can think of five ways to classify prototypes: *nominalist*, *typological*, *morphological*, *cladistic*, and *adaptive*.

As our example for each, let's use the movement generally known as the [Enlightenment](). There is no noun for people whose kernels match the Enlightenment prototype, but there should be, because this noun arguably applies to almost everyone on earth. Let's call these suspicious characters *Luminists*. Their sinister views can be described as *Luminism*.

A *nominalist* classification simply accepts the prototype's classification of itself. Luminists, for example, believe there is no such thing as Luminism. (This is very common.) Rather, they are simply people who have seen the light of reason. It just so happened that they all saw more or less the same light at more or less the same time. But since by definition there's only one such thing as reason, this explanation is not inherently implausible.

A *typological* classification distinguishes prototypes according to specific features. For example, when you distinguish between religions and idealisms - as between Christianity and Luminism - you are performing an act of typology. The flaws in this approach can be seen by the fact that a typological classification of languages tells us Old Saxon is a dialect of Early Apache, since they both have arbitrary word order and long,

incomprehensible sentences. Meanwhile, a vampire bat is a grinning, hairy owl, IHOP and Domino's both serve round food, Congress is considering a new O visa for ostriches, Burmese tribeswomen and other long-necked bipeds, and Luminism is a kind of Confucian Sufi-Buddhism.

A *morphological* classification is like a typological classification with a clue. It attempts to construct a historical descent tree by looking at multiple points of similarity. Morphological classification tells us that Luminism is actually a sect of Christianity, because Luminists share a wide range of kernel features with many Christians, and there are even intermediate forms which can reasonably be described as Christian Luminists or Luminist Christians.

A *cladistic* classification also produces a historical descent tree, but it uses a completely different method. Cladistic classification ignores actual beliefs and looks only at patterns of conversion. It asks: if you are a Luminist and your parents were not Luminists, what were they? Since the answer is usually (if not always) "Christian," in this case cladistics produces the same result as morphology For obvious reasons, this is often so.

Besides the usual trees, both morphological and cladistic methods can also produce graph structure, that is, patterns of combination or *syncretism*. For example, both methods identify Hellenistic and Jewish roots for Christianity, with the cladistic method adding various Roman cults such as those of Augustus, Sol Invictus, and Mithra.

An *adaptive* classification is not interested at all in descent. Rather, it focuses on how and why the prototype *succeeds*. For example, Luminism, Christianity, Sol Invictus and Islam are all prototypes that succeeded (at one time or another) by virtue of being an *official prototype*, that is, by explaining the legitimacy of a government - helping to organize its supporters, strike fear into the hearts of its enemies, brainwash its dutiful taxpaying serfs, etc, etc, etc. But with the exception of the third, all the above have also done just fine in an unofficial capacity, so this *official selection* is not a complete explanation of their success.

Of course, I personally find the last three classification methods the most compelling, with my favorites being the morphological and adaptive methods. But words are just words, and anyone can look at these phenomena any way they like. And if you can suggest any additions to the list, the comments section is, as usual, open.

[A Short History of Ultracalvinism](#) 06/12/2007

Over the last 50 years, Time magazine has become as stupid as its audience. The unfortunate fact is that anyone in 2007 who reads Time, or any magazine like it - yes, even the Economist - is simply not right in the head. (Sometimes I receive random free issues of the Economist or find a crumpled copy in a cafe, and if I accidentally read a few pages, or worse one of the leaders, I fly into a shrieking rage and have to curl up in the closet for a few hours. This rag, which I have loved since I was big enough to go on the

big rollercoaster, is now devoted utterly and irreversibly to the production and distribution of official mendacity.)

However, Time was once run by the Luces and the likes of Whittaker Chambers, and it turned out a word or two in its day. And here's something it gave us on March 16, 1942: American Malvern.

Unfortunately, any slice I could slice from this confection would be unconvincing. The whole thing simply must be read in its natural habitat.

Now isn't that an interesting article?

Don't the phrase "Organized U.S. Protestantism's super-protestant new program" kind of jump out at you there? Especially being as where it is? In the first sentence? After a grand total of six words? "Organized U.S. Protestantism's super-protestant new program?"

It's almost as if, if you were a reader of Time in 1942, and you read an article which used the phrase "organized U.S. Protestantism's super-protestant new program," you'd be expected to have some idea what in the *great jumping bejesus it was talking about*.

Now if we scan slightly further into the text, we see some names. Who the hell, for example, is John R. Mott? Who sings of John R. Mott today? I have no idea, but apparently in 1942 he was a "well-known layman." Only one rings a bell to me: Irving Fisher. Irving Fisher was a prohibitionist and an inflationist. Pretty much everything that doughboy done was wrong. So already, I am on my guard.

We also see some denominations, or at least institutional affiliations. And one thing we note is that all of these affiliations are essentially "low church" in nature. In the British terminology, if they are not Dissenters they are close. And the British low-church tradition is basically Calvinist in nature.

So we can sharpen Time's wording, and describe this incomparable shindig as not just "protestant" (note the small 'p,' there, and the use of the word as a normal descriptive adjective of public policy, just as one might say "communist" or "liberal" or "fascist"), but in fact "calvinist."

When you change one word it's usually good to change two. So let's define the 2007 descendant of "super-protestant" as *ultracalvinist*. (Google gave me only four hits for this concoction.) Basically meaning the same thing, but not having any weird connotations of comic-book powers, and allowing for some semantic drift.

I'll let the content of the Time article speak for itself. Clearly, if you have trouble identifying the 2007 equivalent of 1942's "super-protestant," you have some kind of historical disorder. Perhaps you should spend less time watching al-Jazeera. And I also have the sad honor of informing you that Hugo Chavez is not in fact the second coming of Thomas Jefferson. If you disagree, especially if you disagree violently, with these

assertions, I will have to suggest that perhaps there are other blogs you could read.

Now how should we classify ultracalvinism? Well, we can start by taking it at face value, or at least trying to. We immediately note that, unlike its equally mysterious ancestor, this "super-protestant" thing, ultracalvinism does not claim to be Christian at all. It usually claims to be secular (whatever that means) or even atheistic, although you will get the occasional Michael Lerner type who defends it as deeply spiritual.

Here at UR we know that theism and idealism are basically the same thing, and anything you can do with one you can do with the other. Just think of them as alternative surface protein variations.

(Any immune response aimed at specific gods (say, *Osiris*) or ideals (say, *Equality*, or the *Environment*) will be evaded almost instantly. Any aimed at all theisms, idealisms, or anything in between, is far too broad and will never work. Any aimed at idealism alone is a great way to cultivate a flourishing crop of theisms. And vice versa. This is why we are not so into the Dawkins-Hitchens-Harris-etc-etc-etc treatment here at UR.)

Ultracalvinism appears to be pretty much the same thing as "Unitarianism" - that is, in the 2007 sense of that word. This is also interesting, because Unitarians of one form or another have been running the US since the day it was born. The doctrines have changed wildly, of course, but this name has not, although now it is not so often used. But - for example - if you can detect any distinction between Unitarian Universalism and "political correctness," for example a proposition on which the two conflict, your eyes are sharper than mine.

Often ultracalvinism even has the sheer, unmitigated gall to present itself as the *opposite* of Christianity. More broadly, it's a superior revelation of which Christianity, along with all other religions, is a mere anticipation, a kind of lame-ass John-the-Baptist point-the-way figure. Backward people who refuse to accept this inevitable transition are called "fundamentalists." If they do accept it, they are "moderates" or some other term of approbation.

This applies to all religions, of course, not just Christianity. For example, a "fundamentalist Muslim" is a Muslim (if a sort of Ossianistic reconstituted pseudo-Muslim). But a "moderate Muslim" is an ultracalvinist.

It is also interesting to track the relationship between ultracalvinism and Marxism. Is Marxism a branch of ultracalvinism? Or vice versa? Or are they siblings in some sense? Perhaps this is a fun "exercise for the reader."

If the prehistory of ultracalvinism interests you, three books you may find interesting are The War for Righteousness by Richard Gamble, Lincoln, The Man by Edgar Lee Masters, and Three New Deals by Wolfgang Schivelbusch. A good one-piece starter is an old article of Murray Rothbard's which was just reposted by mises.org - World War I as Fulfillment: Power and the Intellectuals.

And there's also the post-history of super-protestantism. A few weeks ago I mentioned a book that I claimed had the best blurb in the history of the solar system. I am now prepared to reveal the identity of this remarkable masterpiece of 20th-century verbiage.

The book was published in 1964, although my edition is from '66, a really beautiful and timeless slipcased edition from Alfred A. Knopf. The slipcase has an elegant modernist three-color design, sea-blue and black and red, with the author's name and the name of the book, and the translators: Leif Sjoberg and W.H. Auden. The dustcover is white linen with no design, and its front shows just the author's name and the title, in large sea-blue italics, and then under this, in large but not tastelessly large serif roman, the quote:

> "The noblest self-disclosure
> of spiritual struggle and triumph,
> perhaps the greatest testament
> of personal devotion,
> published in this century..."

This is signed, tastefully and simply, in very small italics,

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

The book is Markings by Dag Hammarskjöld, and it very much rewards the reader. If not precisely as author, or reviewer (or translator, for God's sakes, what was he thinking? Gee, I can't even begin to guess) intended.

Update: two other interesting books, chiefly notable because they are (like the Schivelbusch) written recently by well-credentialed authors who consider themselves liberal or even socialist, are Authoritarian Socialism in America by Arthur Lipow, and The Dark Side of the Left: Illiberal Egalitarianism in America by Richard J. Ellis. And the Bellamy salute is not to be missed.

Why Conservatives Never Quite Catch the Boat 06/21/2007

> In a sad effort to boost my sagging stats (only twelve people visited UR last week - seven of them were commenters, and the other five were me), I have decided to begin attacking other bloggers. I thought I'd start with one of the wisest and most perceptive conservatives around, Lawrence Auster, and one of his excellent frequent correspondents, "Thucydides."
>
> Thucydides writes in, apropos of nothing (the sheer brainpower in Auster's salon is enough to carbonize an ox, especially if the ox is pro-immigration):
>
> It occurs to me that one reason most liberals refuse to recognize the problems of illegal or excessive legal immigration, even though some of the effects, for example, driving down wages for the lowest earners, should attract their concern,

is that their utopianism prevents them from acknowledging that we have a culture worth preserving. Their dreams are of some universal rationalist civilization in which human difference will evanesce, by comparison to which our existing culture seems lacking. They gain an elitist self satisfaction on the cheap by positioning themselves as critics of what actually exists; it is unjust, discriminatory, racist, etc. The minute they would acknowledge that we do have a culture that, whatever its flaws, compares favorably to most others in the world, that we do have things to be thankful for, that we have reason for gratitude, they are out of business as superior critics and morally worthy people who imagine a better world. Since their whole sense of identity is bound up in this posture, they cannot for a minute think of abandoning it, even when it clashes with their other goals.

Being unable to acknowledge that there is anything worth preserving about our culture, their universalism takes complete control. Since all people are the same in all places and times, regardless of their particular historic inheritances, any sort of division or border seems in need of rational justification, and they, given their assumptions, cannot find one.

Auster replies:

Very well put. They cannot ever allow themselves to be in the position of defending *our* particular culture, because then they would not be superior to *all* cultures.

In my opinion, it's not well put at all. Its logic is almost right, but it's not quite right.

Who, for example, is "we"? What is "our culture"? Why should subjects of a particular political entity have anything particular in common? What is the difference between this set and the set, say, of all the people whose names start with the letter A, or the set of all people with brown hair?

Not that I am a universalist (a word I like a lot, along with Brahmin, idealist, progressive-idealist, ultracalvinist, or any other names I may invent, or others may submit, in UR's ongoing name-that-death-star contest, whose prize is as usual a bottle of Laphroaig; the referent is the same thing Auster means when he says "liberal," a word I dislike intensely).

Au contraire. I recognize that the section of North America ruled by the government in Washington, DC, is very different both in geography and population from, say, the section of West Africa ruled by the government in Abuja. In fact I feel as if I'd have a great deal of trouble assimilating into any of the many cultures in Nigeria, and I see no reason to assume the converse would be any different.

But the US, too, has many cultures. What do Thucydides and Auster even mean by "culture?" I am really not sure. I prefer to think of America's major social divisions as *castes*; here is my taxonomy, here is my analysis of the conflicts.

Surely, if one attempts to construct some description which combines all these castes - Brahmin (liberal, Democrat), Dalit (ghetto, Democrat), Helot (laborer, Democrat), Optimate (old-school aristo, Republican), and Vaisya (middle American, Republican) - you get mixed nuts with maraschino cherries and calamari. If this is somehow a single "culture," a description I doubt can be defended with any conceivable definition of the word, its main common denominators are McDonalds, "public" schools and CNN. Pound, Hamsun and Celine, come back, we miss you, all is forgiven.

In fact, when you look at the actual issue Thucydides is concerned about, but use my framework rather than his, you see (IMHO) a very clear and intelligible pattern.

The Brahmins, universalists, ultracalvinists, etc, do not hate "our culture" at all. They have a very distinct culture of their own - with a family tree that spends a remarkable amount of time in Massachusetts, upstate New York, etc, etc. (In Charles Royster's excellent and only mildly neo-Unionist picture of the Civil War, The Destructive War, he mentions a foreign traveler in 1864 who asked some random American to explain the war. "It's the conquest of America by Massachusetts," was the answer. Massachusetts, of course, later went on to conquer first Europe and then the entire planet, the views of whose elites as of 2007 bear a surprisingly coincidental resemblance to those held at Harvard in 1945. But I digress.)

No, the Brahmins love their own Brahmin culture. And they hate the culture of their enemies, the Optimates and Vaisyas. I mean, where does a bear shit? Not in the Vatican, that's for sure.

As for Brahmin feelings on the Dalits and Helots, opinions are more complex. Orthodox ultracalvinists idolize Dalits and Helots (as this hilarious study reveals), but most of them do not know any Dalits, and converse with Helots only occasionally and in their professional capacity. They certainly do not want to live in the same neighborhoods as Dalits - although some daring ultra-Brahmin youth do use this as a social selection device, especially with Dalits of the Hispanic variety, who for some reason are less violent. (The principle is much the same as that which leads young Yanomamo warriors to torture themselves with bullet ants; the decision to accept the various discomforts of living in a Dalit neighborhood is the rite of initiation into an exclusive social circle. Though it also of course tends to be cheaper, allowing our "hipster" to attend more assiduously to his various unproductive pursuits.)

But if Brahmins needed to work up a lather of hate against Dalits and Helots, they probably could. However, this is not presently useful. It is quite the contrary. And so instead we see a lather of love. Again, we are not talking about the Pope doing his business in the woods, here.

The Dalit and Helot castes are wonderful allies for the Brahmins. First, they provide, of course, votes. If we counted just B versus OV votes, the OVs would win in a walkover. As a very rough proxy, the last US president to win the white vote was Lyndon Johnson.

Almost if not quite as important, the high crime rates of both Dalits and Helots (if illegal immigration isn't a crime, what is?) make them such useful allies. These entire castes can be deployed as crude but effective demo-armies in the grand old leftist style.

Here, for example, is a major presidential candidate deploying them - rhetorically, at least - as a direct threat in order to extract money. ("It would be really nice if all riots would be quiet riots," and it would be really nice if you could put your hands on your head and accompany me to the nearest ATM.) In fact, the only reason the riots are quiet (that is, pretty much nonexistent), is that sometime around 1975, the black man started to get a little tired of being used as the white man's pawn - if I may indulge in a little blast of retro-rhetoric.

Therefore, what is going on is simple. Brahmins don't really believe all cultures are equal. They believe their culture is superior, and they have a system of thought ("multiculturalism") that contradicts all other systems of thought on the planet, past and present. Again, the Pope and the bear, etc. All cultures are brutal, aggressive predators, and all are positively orgasmic, Highlander style, at the prospect of eliminating any of their competitors. Certainly the Brahmin culture, which as I've described is the current heir to the American and Western European mainline Protestant tradition, is the leading contender and going strong.

Ultracalvinism, this modern descendant of the Puritans, is an aggressive cultural predator that has evolved a cool new trick. It likes to partially reanimate or reinvent the corpses of its smaller and more-decayed victims, as "Aztlan" reinvented the Aztecs, "Kwanzaa" the Ashanti or "Ossian" the Celts, and pretend they're real. Since there is actually no prospect at all of any actual revival of the Aztec, Ashanti or Celtic cultures, this is safe, and it demonstrates ultracalvinism's so-called "tolerance." Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly!

And ultracalvinism is also "tolerant" to branches of other religions which it has in fact taken over, such as Reform Judaism or "moderate" Islam. In fact, no "moderate" of any modern faith could find any conceivable reason to raise his voice in any conversation with any randomly selected Unitarian, which while it may not be entirely conclusive is pretty good evidence that they are actually devotees of the same religion. It's the old zombie manuever.

So we end up with a very simple and quite mundane (exit the Pope, pursued by the bear) reason why the Brahmins are trying to augment the US's Helot population: everyone always needs more allies. (Especially when your stagnant empire is crumbling.)

Of course this is not a conscious thought. But it doesn't need to be a conscious thought. It just needs to be adaptively successful. In other words, it just needs to work. And boy, does it.

So, again, I'd say Thucydides is not quite right. Perhaps he agrees with this logic, perhaps

he doesn't (if he finds this post he's welcome to comment). But it is certainly not what he said. And "not quite right" may be almost right, but that "not quite" is the difference between the ventilation shaft and the ventral asteroid plate.

Which may not matter at all if you just want to fire up a mob. But dissidents in the West today cannot win by firing up a mob. They can only win by convincing young smart people, who will otherwise be convinced by the numerous extremely convincing official sources of information that are constantly competing for access to their tender eyes and ears.

Conservatives: if Washington could be conquered by peasants with pitchforks, don't you think it would have happened by now? Do you think there are more peasants with pitchforks, or fewer, than there were ten years ago? Do you have any strategy for reversing this trend? If not, aren't you just wasting time and annoying the pig?

In my opinion, it is not Larry Auster's words that we can learn from - although those words are often remarkably cogent and well-informed. It is his actions. He may think in terms of a strain of American nationalism that hasn't been effective since Robert Taft was a little boy, but his blog tells a different story. Compare it to National Review's Corner someday, and you'll see the difference. Auster's random emailers (he hand-moderates everything, and only accepts comments via email) are much smarter and better-informed than most of NRO's pros.

Auster is collecting the smartest people around. So why does he keep pursuing rhetorical strategies that appear calculated only to rally people who already support his movement - rather than strategies designed to compete with and defeat ultracalvinism's own reproductive system, capturing the cream of their youth and turning them to the dark side of the Force? Excuse me, I meant away from the dark side, of course.

If there is one general weakness in the conservative strategy, it strikes me as this unwillingness to admit that "liberalism" is actually mainline Protestantism, which is actually Christianity. Whether or not it obeys any specific detail of Christian or Protestant doctrine, such as the validity of the Holy Trinity, the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus, the predestination of the elect, etc, etc, etc, is entirely irrelevant. We are talking about a continuous cultural tradition whose superficial features constantly mutate. It's a waste of time to generate antibodies to metaphysical doctrines. (I will say more about this in a bit.)

Of course, if you are a Christian, you don't believe these features are superficial. But doesn't that make a nice trap? Neither side can call a spade a spade. The ultracalvinists need to hide the fact that they are spades, and the conservatives, since they believe that only conservative spades are true spades, refuse to bestow upon their enemies the prized status of spadefulness.

Whereas if you can make it past this trap, you are rewarded with an enormous store of clear and easy-to-apply metaphors for religious persecution, an entirely quotidian and

extremely common phenomenon which everyone understands.

For example, if ultracalvinists are Christians, "political correctness" is *religious orthodoxy*. Hm, where have we seen this before? Perhaps in Massachusetts? I mean, is it any surprise that Ivy League schools are acting, in effect, as ultracalvinist seminaries? Isn't that exactly what they were founded as?

And what are "multiculturalism" and "diversity" but *religious tests for office*? Hm, I don't know anything of the sort in history. Maybe in Nepal? Nah.

In fact, religious conservatives, whose Christianity is generally of the non-mainline sort, although not every single one of them is an actual practicing snake-handler, have basically taken over the traditional role of Catholics in the British political system.

For example, Brahmins are all in a tizzy that the Justice Department under Bush has hired eight lawyers from conservative Christian law schools (Ave Maria and Regent). Of course, in the same period, it hired sixty-three from Harvard and Yale, but once the camel's nose is in the tent, etc. It invites contamination. You can't just let your institutions be captured like that, and the New York Times is very wise to object. I mean, they should know, shouldn't they?

And this is why conservatives never quite catch the boat. They do not want to admit that what they are fighting is, in fact, a very old religious war, in which their side holds and has always held the losing hand. Conservatives cannot admit that conservatism is futile, because then they'd have nothing to do. No man will willingly abolish his own occupation.

So conservative political activists, too, do good service as their enemies' pawns. Because the only winning political strategies I can imagine for conservatives, at least in the near term, involve things like boycotting elections. Since conservatives believe in "America" and in democracy, they will never do this. Therefore, they lose, and they will continue to lose.

This castrated pseudo-opposition is of enormous use to the ultracalvinist blue government. It disguises the essentially one-party nature of the Polygon, the vast majority of whose servants are Democrats, and whose bizarre idea of apolitical or "post-partisan" government would otherwise not withstand two chimpanzee-seconds of actual mental cogitation.

Furthermore, the conservative movement is remarkably effective as a scare puppet. The American political system consistently promotes the most idiotic, backward and ridiculous "conservatives" it can find. Every year, mainstream American conservatives are stupider, more venal, and more crass. The gradient from Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn and Albert Jay Nock to Jonah Goldberg and John Podhoretz, let alone to Michael Savage or Ann Coulter, is simply pathetic. Again, this is not somebody's "plot," it is not a conscious design, it is an adaptive pattern whose beneficiary is quite obvious.

Stupid conservative foreign policies are wonderfully useful as well. The war in Iraq has been the greatest boon to the Polygon since - well, since the war in Vietnam, in fact. Gee, isn't it funny how that works?

There is no exit strategy for conservatives which does not involve (a) disassociating themselves completely from the failed Republican Party, and (b) successfully communicating with young Brahmins who are willing to question the tenets of the rapidly-ossifying ultracalvinist cult and the rule of the vast, moribund Brezhnevite institutions which sustain and transmit it.

Moreover, any such conversation has to involve you converting them, rather than them converting you - something by no means guaranteed with your average "South Park conservative." And no, you are not going to convince them to handle snakes or speak in tongues. Focus on the basic fact that while they may think they're rebels, they're actually loyal servants of a theocratic one-party state, and you might even get somewhere.

[Some Objections to Ultracalvism](#) 06/22/2007

If by any chance you read this blog just for the articles, it's my duty to inform you that you are missing out on most of the fun. UR may not be the smartest blog on the net, but it certainly has the smartest commenters. This is probably just because it's new, and the yahoos haven't arrived yet. But it remains wondrous to me.

(At some point I may slacken the flow of verbiage so that old discussions stay fresh longer. I feel it's important, since UR is a new blog, to maintain a pretty brutal tempo, so that the site doesn't seem inviting to the wrong kind of reader. Hopefully at some point there will be a critical mass of disgruntled, speed-reading malcontents who can discipline their own ranks.)

There were a couple of comments on my original [ultracalvinism post](#) that I didn't get a chance to respond to. Rather than posting to a long-dead thread, I thought I'd bring them out here.

First, commenter extraordinaire Michael, who regularly exposes the superficial threads of my flimsy autodidactic pseudoerudition.

Michael [points out](#) that, given that most of us think of the essence of Calvinism as predestination (the doctrine that God, who knows all things, knows which of us will or will not be saved), describing progressive-idealists (who are universalists in the strict Christian sense, ie, they believe we are all saved) as "ultracalvinist" is pretty strange.

And indeed I am bending the usual meaning a little here. The reason I think I can get away with this is simple: if you define Calvinism in Michael's way, Calvinism is pretty much as dead as Mithraism.

Is there really anyone in the world in 2007 who is seriously concerned with the [Synod of Dort](#)? Who has any strong opinions at all on the subjects of unconditional election, total depravity, the perseverance of the saints, limited atonement, or irresistible grace - the "Five Points" of orthodox Calvinism?

Well, actually, they do have opinions about one of these: irresistible grace. This is the general path of doctrinal evolution: unused organs atrophy, and the whole machine becomes stripped down, like white cave-fish that shed their eyes. Jefferson [dumped the Trinity](#), Emerson relieved us of Hell, and so on down to [Harvey Cox](#) and his "secular theology." (If you think "secular" is synonymous with "atheistic," the full horror of the situation is not yet clear to you.)

When Michael - along with, admittedly, most educated people - equates Calvinism with predestination (aka unconditional election), he is applying what in an older post I called a *nominalist* classification strategy. That is, he is taking Calvinist theology at face value. Calvinism defines itself as the Five Points, so why shouldn't we respect this?

Here's why: because the result that the nominalist approach produces is that a replicating prototype of considerable political and cultural significance, with known pathological tendencies, has simply disappeared. It has become extinct. There is no need at all to worry about it. These are not the droids you're looking for.

If we apply either the *morphological* or *cladistic* strategies, however, we get a very different result. The replicator at once pops back into view. It has not disappeared at all - it just mutated into Unitarianism (that is, non-universalist Unitarianism, now itself extinct), which begat Transcendentalism, which begat Unionism, Progressivism and the ecumenical movement, which became the "super-protestant" Establishment so derided by the late great flower children, who conquered it and gave us multiculturalism, "diversity," etc.

Not an unusual turn of events at all. Belief systems and languages evolve in much the same ways, and if you look at the historical gyrations of, say, English, the evolution from Calvinism to ultracalvinism seems positively straightforward and sedate.

And when we use the *adaptive* method, the result is even more disturbing.

First, of course, this trick of dropping off the radar screen is very suspicious. In fact, as I pointed out in my last post, ultracalvinism has extremely compelling reasons for not wanting to be known as either Christian or Protestant, because its patterns of intolerance are extremely ugly and familiar to anyone who can swallow any such taxonomy. (Peter Hitchens has called its Limey equivalent "the most intolerant faith to dominate Britain since the Reformation.") If there was ever a general understanding that "political correctness" is merely a case of common-or-garden religious intolerance, its apologists would find their jocular habit of excusing it as a kind of intellectual rowdiness, boys-will-be-boys and so on, to no longer roll so smoothly off their tongues, and its foes would find

themselves infinitely better-armed.

But worst, the adaptive method does not identify predestination as the salient invariant of Calvinism. Nor does it focus on total depravity or even irresistible grace.

Instead, it notes that a shared feature of all prototypes in this line of descent, from Calvin to Emerson to Hillary Clinton, from Geneva to Chautauqua to the Haight-Ashbury, has been their assiduous insistence on *building God's kingdom on Earth*.

Of course this is what Erich Voegelin called "immanentizing the eschaton." Doctrinally, it originates in a [postmillennial](#) interpretation of the Book of Revelation. If you disagree with this interpretation, as many do, you might say (as Michael has) that this represents a rejection of Christianity in favor of gnosticism.

But again, this is nominalism. And it is also focusing, as I have said many times, on metaphysical beliefs. By definition metaphysical beliefs cannot be directly adaptive, that is, they cannot by themselves create an incentive to alter the real world in ways that improve the belief system's ability to transmit itself.

Whereas *building God's kingdom on earth* is certainly a physical action, and the belief that it is morally imperative is certainly a physical belief. And is it adaptive? Can Kobe drive the lane? Did Zeppelin rock? Does the Pope... etc.

So when we identify progressive secularism as one thing and Protestant Christianity as another, we have basically just walked up to one of the most dangerous intellectual pathogens in Western history, said "how ya doin," invited it to a wild hot-tub party and promised to deactivate our immune system for the evening. Is this safe epistemology? I think not.

There was another comment in the thread I wanted to respond to, but I'm out of time for today. I'll try and get to it tomorrow.

[The Ultracalvinist Hypothesis: In Perspective](#) 06/24/2007

The "ultracalvinist hypothesis" is the proposition that the present-day belief system commonly called "progressive," "multiculturalist," "universalist," "liberal," "politically correct," etc, is actually best considered as a sect of Christianity.

Specifically, ultracalvinism (which I have also described [here](#) and [here](#)) is the primary surviving descendant of the American [mainline Protestant](#) tradition, which has been the dominant belief system of the United States since its founding. It should be no surprise that it continues in this role, or that since the US's victory in the last planetary war it has spread worldwide.

Ultracalvinism is an ecumenical syncretism of the mainline, not traceable to any one

sectarian label. But its historical roots are easy to track with the tag Unitarian. The meaning of this word has mutated considerably in the last 200 years, but at any point since the 1830s it is found attached to the most prestigious people and ideas in the US, and since 1945 in the world.

The trouble with "Unitarian" as a label is that (a) it exhibits this evolutionary blurring, and (b) it at least nominally refers to a specific metaphysical belief (anti-Trinitarianism). So I took the liberty of coining "ultracalvinist."

The "calvinist" half of this word refers to the historical chain of descent from John Calvin and his religious dictatorship in Geneva, passing through the English Puritans to the New England Unitarians, abolitionists and Transcendentalists, Progressives and Prohibitionists, super-protestants, hippies and secular theologians, and down to our own dear progressive multiculturalists.

The "ultra" half refers to my perception that, at least compared to other Christian sects, the beliefs of this faith are relatively aggressive and unusual.

In fact, they are so unusual that most people don't see ultracalvinism as Christian at all. For example, on the theological side, ultracalvinism is best known as Unitarian Universalism. (It's an interesting exercise to try to find any conflicts between UUism and "political correctness.") Ultracalvinists are perfectly free to be atheists, or believe in any God or gods - as long as they don't adhere to any revealed tradition, which would make them "fundamentalists." In general, ultracalvinists oppose revelation and consider their beliefs to be pure products of reason. And perhaps they are right in this - but I feel the claim should at least be investigated.

I am not a theist, so I don't care much for theology. Paranormal beliefs are not beliefs about the real world, and cannot directly motivate real-world action. As a result, they are usually of no adaptive significance, tend to mutate frequently, and are a dangerous basis for classification.

And when we look at the real-world beliefs of ultracalvinists, we see that ultracalvinism is anything but content-free. By my count, the ultracalvinist creed has four main points:

First, ultracalvinists believe in the *universal brotherhood of man*. As an Ideal (an undefined universal) this might be called *Equality*. ("All men and women are born equal.") If we wanted to attach an "ism" to this, we could call it *fraternalism*.

Second, ultracalvinists believe in the *futility of violence*. The corresponding ideal is of course *Peace*. ("Violence only causes more violence.") This is well-known as *pacifism*.

Third, ultracalvinists believe in the *fair distribution of goods*. The ideal is *Social Justice*, which is a fine name as long as we remember that it has nothing to do with justice in the dictionary sense of the word, that is, the accurate application of the law. ("From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.") To avoid hot-button words, we

will ride on a name and call this belief *Rawlsianism*.

Fourth, ultracalvinists believe in the *managed society*. The ideal is *Community*, and a community by definition is led by benevolent experts, or *public servants*. ("Public servants should be professional and socially responsible.") After their counterparts east of the Himalaya, we can call this belief *mandarism*.

Now, where do these beliefs come from? What is their origin and etiology? Why do so many of us in 2007 believe in these particular concepts? Were they invented in 1967? Or 1907? Or 1607? Or what?

Richard Dawkins has referred to his beliefs, which certainly include the four points above, as Einsteinian religion. Dawkins' description of this creed is poetic and extremely reminiscent of Emerson's Divinity School Address. Has he never heard of Transcendentalism? Is he unaware that Emerson was a Unitarian minister?

Einstein certainly believed in the four points as well. Did he invent them during his annus mirabilis? Did they arrive in a stroke of light along with Brownian motion, special relativity and the photoelectric effect? Probably not, because the four points also feature very prominently in a little book called Looking Backward, which appeared in 1888 and sold about a bazillion copies. The author of this novel was not a Hindu. His readers were not Zoroastrians. The political movement Bellamy helped spawn did not put its faith in Allah. And nor were any of these folks atheists, which was still quite a dirty word at the time.

In fact, the four points are very common and easily recognizable tenets of Protestant Christianity, specifically in its Calvinist or Puritan strain. You can find them all over the place in the New Testament, and any subject of Oliver Cromwell's saintly republic would have recognized them instantly. Rawlsianism is definitely the last of the four to develop, but even it is very common in the 17th century, when its adherents were known as Diggers - a name that, not surprisingly, was later reused. Ultracalvinism fits quite neatly in the English Dissenter and low church tradition. (Note the blatant POV of the latter page, with loaded words like "reform," a good indication that Wikipedians incline to ultracalvinism.)

So the proposition that "Einsteinian religion" is some kind of 20th-century novelty is at least as much of an offense to Occam's razor as any Flying Spaghetti Monster. It's like saying that the modern inhabitants of France are not in fact the French, because sometime in the Middle Ages the French died out and were replaced by immigrants, who coincidentally happened to also speak Old French.

If the above is an accurate analysis, what we have here is very interesting. Because it is a modern, thriving, and remarkably well-camouflaged, example of crypto-Christianity.

Ultracalvinism's camouflage mechanism is easy to understand. If you are an ultracalvinist, you must dispute the claim that the four points are actually Christian, because you believe

in them, and you believe they are justified by reason rather than faith. Therefore they are universal and no one can doubt them, whether Christian, Muslim or Jew.

If you are not an ultracalvinist, you are probably some other kind of Christian, presumably one who still believes in God, the Bible as revelation, non-universal salvation, etc. Therefore you see ultracalvinism just as Catholics once saw Protestants, or Trinitarians saw Unitarians - as not Christians at all. So the result is the same. The ultracalvinist cloak of invisibility is only at risk from freethinking atheists, such as myself - a tiny and mostly irrelevant population.

The question is: why? How did we fall for this? How did we enable an old, well-known strain of Christianity to mutate and take over our minds, just by discarding a few bits of theological doctrine and describing itself as "secular"? (As La Wik puts it: "Despite occasional confusion, secularity is not synonymous with atheism." Indeed.)

In other words, we have to look at the *adaptive landscape* of ultracalvinism. What are the adaptive advantages of crypto-Christianity? Why did those Unitarians, or even "scientific socialists," who downplayed their Christian roots, outcompete their peers?

Well, I think it's pretty obvious, really. The combination of electoral democracy and "separation of church and state" is an almost perfect recipe for crypto-Christianity.

As I've said before, separation of church and state is a narrow-spectrum antibiotic. What you really need is separation of information and security. If you have a rule that says the state cannot be taken over by a church, a constant danger in any democracy for obvious reasons, the obvious mutation to circumvent this defense is for the church to find some plausible way of denying that it's a church. Dropping theology is a no-brainer. Game over, you lose, and it serves you right for vaccinating against a nonfunctional surface protein.

We can see this very easily with another modern crypto-Christian movement: intelligent design. Supporters of intelligent design claim it is not Christianity at all. Rather, it is good science, derived like all science from pure reason, and the fact that it seems to resemble the Bible is (a) a coincidence and (b) evidence for how true the Bible is, after all. Therefore, like all good science, it should be taught to innocent young people.

I wouldn't want my children to go to a school where they learned intelligent design. At least not if they learned it as simply reason and reality. But I also wouldn't want my children to go to a school where they learned ultracalvinism as reason and reality.

Unfortunately, the latter is a lot harder to avoid.

Crypto-Calvinism, Slightly Tweaked 06/26/2007

As usual, much excellent discussion has appeared on my last ultracalvinism post. Of course, readers should bear in mind that many of these commenters, especially the more

flattering ones, are posting from my IP address. Perhaps they are outside in a van, snarfing the wireless.

Nonetheless, various persons have convinced me that the name is not quite right. I think the problem is the "ultra," which does not say enough and comes too close to a mere pejorative.

So on further reflection, I prefer *cryptocalvinism*, meaning two things: that, like Calvin and as a direct result of his intellectual heritage, cryptocalvinists are building the Kingdom of God on Earth, a political system that seeks to eradicate every form of unrighteousness; and that they prefer not to acknowledge this characterization of their mission and heritage.

One problem is that there's already an early Lutheran schism called [Crypto-Calvinism](). But then again, there's also something called [Calvinism](). Both these terms are customarily used to describe theological doctrines, such as predestination, grace, etc.

I find it fascinating to observe the fights people once had over Christian theology. Modern readers, especially nontheists such as myself, but I suspect also Christians, have trouble understanding the emotional investment in these details of the heavenly universe. Perhaps it's easiest to see them as mere tribal identifiers, the 16th-century version of Manchester United, Hamas or the Crips. This strikes me as disrespectful, though, and presentist. Readers with a better eye for history are invited to comment.

In any case, my interest (and I think that of most readers) is not in theology, but in culture, government and the evolution of ideas. Stalin for me remains part of the history of Marxism, although few points of Marx's doctrine can be identified in his actions. Ideas and languages have similar patterns of evolution, and it is not a misnomer that Old English and English share a name, though the two are nowhere near mutually intelligible.

For me, Calvinism is a system of government which aims at total righteousness. As Stefan Zweig describes it, in his wonderfully dramatic *The Right To Heresy: Castellio Against Calvin*,

> A master of the art of organization, Calvin had been able to transform a whole city, a whole State, whose numerous burghers had hitherto been freemen, into a rigidly obedient machine; had been able to extirpate independence, and to lay an embargo on freedom of thought in favor of his own exclusive doctrine. The powers of the State were under his supreme control; as wax in his hands were the various authorities, Town Council and Consistory, university and law-courts, finance and morality, the written and the spoken and even the secretly whispered word.

Zweig describes the Consistory, Geneva's religious police:

The members of this moral Cheka thrust fingers into every pie. They felt the women's dresses to see whether their skirts were not too long or too short, whether these garments had superfluous frills or dangerous slits. The police carefully inspected the coiffure, to see that it did not tower too high; they counted the rings on the victim's fingers, and looked to see how many pairs of shoes were in the cupboard. From the bedroom they passed on to the kitchen table, to ascertain whether the prescribed diet was not being exceeded by a soup or a course of meat, or whether sweets and jams were hidden away somewhere.

And the burning of Servetus:

The chains attached to the stake were wound four or five times around it and around the poor wretch's wasted body. Between this and the chains, the executioner's assistants then inserted the book and the manuscript which Servetus had sent to Calvin under seal to ask Calvin's fraternal opinion upon it. Finally, in scorn, there was pressed upon the martyr's brow a crown of leaves impregnated with sulphur. The preliminaries were over. The executioner kindled the faggots and the murder began.

When the flames rose around him, Servetus uttered so dreadful a cry that many of the onlookers turned their eyes away from the pitiful sight. Soon the smoke interposed a veil in front of the writhing body, but the yells of agony grew louder and louder, until at length came an imploring scream: "Jesus, Son of the everlasting God, have pity on me!" The struggle with death lasted half an hour. Then the flames abated, the smoke dispersed, and attached to the blackened stake there remained, above the glowing embers, a black, sickening, charred mass, which had lost human semblance.

But Zweig (whose *World Of Yesterday* is simply required reading) is as fair as he can be:

Granted, dynamic variety was sacrificed to monotony, and joy to a mathematical correctness; but, in return, education was raised to a niche among the arts. Schools, universities and welfare institutions were beyond compare; the sciences were sedulously cultivated...

This sounds not unfamiliar at all. As does the first quote above. Unless it be "Punch" Sulzberger, no Protestant pope presides over this new Geneva of the postwar West; and yet the views of our professors, journalists and civil servants are, by historical standards, remarkably synoptic. (Of course, they could all just be right.)

But the other two quotes feel strange to us. No one is burning heretics these days. Or even racists - though, like Castellio, they do have some trouble remaining employed. We have no religious police who fondle women's dresses - although it is, of course, important to recycle.

And to the extent that we are religious, we almost exclusively follow the theology of

Servetus - who has a good claim to be considered the first Unitarian. Most Christian denominations are still technically Trinitarian, but few make a big deal of it.

The details change. The details will always change. In Calvin's day, big hair offended God. Today, burning fossil fuels is bad for the Environment. Able logicians can argue either point. All kinds of evidence - biblical or scientific - can be deployed.

But as any Castellio can tell you, no Calvin will ever conclude that big hair pleases God, or that burning fossil fuels is good for the Environment. The evidence is sought and, obedient, it appears. Few even doubt it, none argue the converse. Calvinism speaks with one voice.

As this wonderful TIME article (which I've quoted before) reveals, 65 years ago the Federal Council of Churches, an organization of mainline Protestant sects with Calvinist roots, endorsed a system of world government strikingly similar to that supported by right-thinking persons, such as Bono, today.

TIME described this program as "super-protestant," and if modern readers are baffled by this usage, they can consult such works as Richard Gamble's The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation, which moves the clock back another 30 years, and is full of bloodcurdling Calvinism in a much more militant vein. This same strand reaches back to Beecher's Bibles, the Puritans, Cromwell and his republic of saints, and ultimately, of course, Calvin himself.

But somewhere in the last 60 years, it vanishes. The modern descendant of "super-protestantism" is obvious. Now and then, like Barack Obama, it will even claim to "take back Christianity." But such audacity is rare, and for the most part cryptocalvinism is simply "secular." As far as most people these days know, it was born adult in 1945, like Minerva from the head of Zeus. Or it had always existed all along. Or old versions of it are fabricated in previous generations, in the classic style of Whig history.

I see secularization as an extension of ecumenism, the process that gave us the Federal Council of Churches in the first place. In the 20th century, rationalism - the claim that one's beliefs are derived from reason and science - will always outcompete justification from revelation. Of course, a genuine freethinker has no reason to believe any such claim. But nor does a genuine Methodist have any reason to make nice with a genuine Presbyterian.

Another benefit of secularization is that cryptocalvinism, unlike "super-protestantism," can twist the First Amendment and the general humanist tradition of religious tolerance into a weapon to assault its enemies, the unreformed revelationist Christians. Before the 1950s, the nature of the US as a Christian nation was generally accepted. But when the Warren Court revised this tradition, it had the letter of the law (if not its historic meaning) on its side. Effectively, cryptocalvinism rose to power through Christianity, and then used that power to "pull up the ladder" - a classic Machiavellian maneuver.

Of course, all of these changes are adaptive, rather than conscious. There is no plot. The Illuminati are not involved. The miracle of evolution is that its results are indistinguishable from the product of an intelligent designer. Or, in this case, an intelligent conspirator.

One fascinating fact about the secularization mutation is that, like the human lactose-tolerance gene, it has arisen spontaneously more than once. The relationship between Calvinism and Rousseauvianism is remarkably like that between super-protestantism and liberal universalism. Rousseau, of course, hailed from Geneva, and Robespierre used Rousseau's nominally non-Christian message of universal love to establish a reign that made Calvin look like Coolidge. In fact, through Hegel, Rousseauvian idealistic nationalism was a significant contributor to the progressive Christianity of Woodrow Wilson, which of course begat "super-protestantism." Like languages, ideas tend to have family trees which are actually dags.

Since I've changed the name, let me repeat the four ideals of cryptocalvinism: *Equality* (the universal brotherhood of man), *Peace* (the futility of violence), *Social Justice* (the fair distribution of goods), and *Community* (the leadership of benevolent public servants).

Cryptocalvinists that believe these ideals are universal, that they can be derived from science and logic, that no reasonable and well-intentioned person can dispute them, and that their practice if applied correctly will lead to an ideal society.

I believe that they are arbitrary, that they are inherited from Protestant Christianity, that they serve primarily as a justification for the rule of the cryptocalvinist establishment, or Polygon, and that they are a major cause of corruption, tyranny, poverty and war.

We'll look at some of these disagreements in upcoming posts.

[The Rawlsian God: Cryptocalvinism in Action](#) 06/28/2007

Regular visitors to this dank intellectual alley will be familiar with my obstinate insistence that progressive idealism, multiculturalism, liberal universalism, or any similar label for the set of thoughts that all good people think, are not just good thoughts, but in fact the dominant modern sect of Christianity.

As an atheist I have no interest in theology, and I do not find theological doctrines, such as the divinity of Jesus, the existence of God, the nature of the Trinity, etc, a useful way to classify the patterns of belief around me. I am only concerned with what people believe about the real world. I think these beliefs evolve much as languages do, I feel it is important to track their evolution across time, and I refuse to remove them from my radar screen on account of theological mutations which strike me as purely superficial.

You may or may not buy this story. But I hope you can agree that the Harvard faculty in 2007 by and large believes in human equality, social justice, world peace and community

leadership, that the faculty of the same institution held much the same beliefs in 1957, 1907, 1857 and 1807, and that in any of these years they would have described these views as the absolute cynosure of Christianity. Perhaps I am just naturally suspicious, but it strains my credulity slightly to believe that sometime in 1969, the very same beliefs were rederived from pure reason and universal ethics, whose concurrence with the New Testament is remarkable to say the least.

At least for the purpose of abusing it, I call this sect cryptocalvinism: "crypto" because it conceals its ancestry; and "Calvinist" first because it is the leading direct descendant, through the New England Puritans, of Calvinism proper, and second because it resembles Calvin's Genevan theocracy in many details, most strikingly its fondness for official truth.

Calvinist doctrine has mutated considerably over the years, especially but not exclusively in the theological department. Today's hippie creed of universal love, though it owes less to the 1960s than the 1830s, would come as quite a shock to the grim old doctor. However, one feature that almost all descendants of Calvinism share is an essentially postmillennial commitment to building the kingdom of God on earth - as seen, for example, in the Puritans' city-on-a-hill rhetoric.

But, as some commenters have pointed out, this is all quite irrelevant. Don't we all want to live in a good society? Is it utterly surprising that many Biblical ideas are good ideas? Didn't Jesus also say the sky was blue? Certainly Harvard was founded as a Christian institution, certainly it remained explicitly so until recently, and certainly our secular universalist culture has deep Christian roots. But in the liberal postwar era, we wisely discarded the aspects of Christianity that are obsolete and superstitious, while retaining its sound ethical core, reinforced with a bracing dose of modern reason and science.

This is a very sensible argument. No superficial rhetoric can dismiss it. Certainly there's an element of what one might almost call McCarthyism in my attempts to connect universalism with Protestantism. Of course, McCarthyist techniques of guilt by association are routinely applied against Nazis, fascists, racists, and other bad actors, but this doesn't make them good. The Third Reich, for example, was the first Western state to connect smoking to lung cancer. Which doesn't make me want to go out and buy a pack of Marlboros.

The belief system I call "cryptocalvinism" claims to be a pure product of philosophy, not a mere evolution of blue-state mainline Protestantism. Similarly, the modern "intelligent design" movement assures us that its association with red-state Christianity is just as coincidental.

The only way to refute these claims is on the merits. The fact that proponents of "intelligent design" tend to be fundamentalist Christians is a good clue that atheists such as myself should scrutinize their theories closely. But it is not actually evidence in the case. Likewise, the fact that multicultural universalists embrace ideas closely related to those of their own Christian forebears could explain, *if* those ideas are unrelated to reality, how they got to be so popular and successful. But it goes nowhere at all toward showing

the if.

So I thought it'd be interesting to take a look at the leading political philosopher of liberal universalism: John Rawls. Specifically, Rawls is a theorist of *social justice*, one of my "four points" of cryptocalvinism.

Actually, I don't just want to take a look at Rawls. I want his head for my mantelpiece. The trouble is that so many writers have debunked Rawls so completely - Nozick's treatment is perhaps the most thorough - that the best anyone can hope for now is a cheap Chinese copy. Nonetheless I will engage in this ritual of decapitation as though it actually mattered.

My contention is that Rawls is not a philosopher, but a minister. Like his Calvinist forebears, he is trying to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. Unlike them, he doesn't admit it. The basic thrust of my attack is to make the Christian aspect of Rawls' theory explicit, and note how much more sense Rawlsianism makes in this light - and how little sense it makes when we take the light away.

The first thing we notice about Rawls is the title of his famous book, *A Theory of Justice*. As I've mentioned before, this is not just hubristic, but actively Orwellian. For about the last 2500 years, the word *justice* and its various Indo-European predecessors have meant "the accurate execution of the law." Rawls is no more interested in law than I am in dressage, and when he redefines the word *justice* to mean, effectively, *righteousness*, one notes with some dismay that he is confiscating a noun with no existing synonyms. But perhaps this was the publisher's decision - maybe *A Theory of Righteousness* just wouldn't have moved as well.

The second thing we notice is that Rawls is that he's an incredibly tedious and turgid writer. He has one idea, which he repeats at a length that's simply unbelievable. Bad writing is worrisome in any defense of the status quo, because it fails Auden's ogre test. But again, it is not conclusive.

So let's take a closer look at Rawls' idea, the famous veil of ignorance. But let's try it out in the context where it makes the most sense - the kingdom of God on earth.

Suppose God did, in fact, exist. Suppose he was omnipotent, omniscient, and infinitely benevolent, employing an arbitrary number of angels to achieve his perfect wishes. If you are such a hardcore atheist that you can't imagine this at all, imagine God as a space alien with access to infinite alien technology.

Said alien is newly arrived in the Solar System and wishes to establish his kingdom on Earth, perhaps on account of its water-based ecosphere, mild climate and excellent chocolate. Because he is, in fact, God, implementation details are not a concern. And because he is infinitely benevolent, he wants the best for everyone. Therefore he consults John Rawls.

Rawls tells him that an ideal society will be the one chosen by arbitrary humans who are unaware of the position they are to occupy in that society. So, for example, a Rawlsian might ask: who should be paid more, a NASCAR driver or a truck driver? The observer behind the veil of ignorance is likely to say the truck driver should be paid more, because driving in the Daytona 500 is a hell of a lot of fun and hauling a load of sofas from Chicago to Vegas is no fun at all. Unless the truck driver is paid more to compensate for this inequality, he or she is relatively disadvantaged, an outcome the observer (who can have no reason not to fear assignment to this role) will seek to avoid.

There's an almost medieval flavor to this exercise, and it can lead to an infinite amount of intellectual entertainment. Of course, not even John Rawls can derive "ought" from "is," and there is no rational reason to prefer his definition of an ideal society to anyone else's. Ethics are fundamentally aesthetic. But there is a clarity and prettiness to the Rawlsian theory of righteousness that makes it aesthetically quite attractive, and I certainly cannot imagine any solution to the same problem that I'd find more satisfying.

The difficulty, of course, is in the problem. What Rawls has performed is a beautiful feat of misdirection. His imaginary problem is almost perfectly designed to misdirect the thinking man's attention away from the real problem.

In the kingdom of God on earth, God finds it very easy to make sure NASCAR drivers are paid less than truck drivers. No one can disobey God. He assigns us to our roles, he directs our every movement. If God tells you to turn left at the next light, you don't hang a right.

The question is: what relevance does this have for the actual problem of government? The answer is: none. As Madison put it, if men were angels, we would need no government at all. In Rawls' kingdom, we are not angels, but we are governed by angels. The great engineering problem of designing a system in which fallible humans can govern each other and get along simply does not exist in Rawls' philosophy.

Of course Rawls does not actually say this. He just encourages it. By setting up an ideal of righteousness that only divine rule can achieve, Rawls supplies the perfect distraction to help his readers forget that in reality, men are governed only by men, and history knows only two kinds of government: those based on law, and those based on violence.

For example, in the NASCAR-teamster example, what sort of law would ensure a Rawlsian result? Do we have wage and price controls, Nixon style? The odor of medieval Christianity is unmistakable. You can almost taste the sumptuary laws.

Or would there even be laws? In keeping with its derogation of mere formalist justice, Rawls' philosophy is profoundly antilegal. The veil-of-ignorance problem does not even pretend to any objective solution which can be reliably agreed by multiple disputing parties.

If we were ruled by the Rawlsian god, who solves the veil-of-ignorance problem himself

and imposes the answer by sheer angelic force, that'd be just lovely. But in the kingdom of men, when different men have different definitions of "justice," they have a well-known tendency to fight over the result. Cosmic righteousness and consistent, objective law are not just different things. They are actively opposed. Arbitrary rules whose derivation is entirely historical, but whose result is absolutely clear - such as property titles - are often the only way to define a consensus that everyone can agree on peacefully.

In other words, Rawlsianism without the Rawlsian god is an almost perfect recipe for friction. Small wonder that in the 20th century, almost 100 million people were murdered in various attempts to construct egalitarian utopias. You can't fault Edward Bellamy for not knowing better, but you can fault Rawls - and I do.

The design of legal systems is an engineering problem. When we understate this problem, when we replace it with a religious or quasi-religious substitute, or when we seek levels of perfection that are only achievable through the intervention of benevolent spirits, we invite engineering disaster. Rawls himself was lucky enough to live his whole life in a country governed, if imperfectly, by something that still resembled the rule of law, in which "justice" still meant justice and not heavenly righteousness. But not all have been so fortunate.

The Mystery of Pacifism 07/01/2007

Having dealt with *Social Justice*, we move to the next Ideal in the cryptocalvinist pantheon - *Peace*.

Again, our task is to identify the theistic roots of the modern idealism. Given that the Prince of Peace is not Edward, Rupert or Charles, this is hardly an onerous task. But I think there's still some good meat on the bone.

It should be clear that by the standards of the 19th century, post-1945 Westerners are astoundingly pacifist. Or, to state the same proposition in the other direction, by 2007 standards our ancestors were remarkably bellicose. Anyone who doubts the proposition should recall the Ems Telegram or the Don Pacifico Affair, and wonder how a Palmerston would describe the case of Cleo Noel. (I'm not sure "pacifist" is the word he'd use.)

We are so familiar with pacifism that it's easy to take the concept for granted. In reality, I think, it's one of the weirdest animals to ever inhabit the human mind. It makes the Virgin Birth (which is *not* the Immaculate Conception) look positively straightforward.

The problem is that *everyone* believes in peace. Okay, perhaps not everyone. There certainly have been cultures that glorified war, generally for its well-known character-forming effect. Since we were all brought up on Erich Maria Remarque, it's a mind-expanding experience to read the likes of Ernst Jünger, whose *The Storm of Steel* I recommend to anyone.

But to even the most die-hard of militarists, the object of war is peace. That is, the object of war is victory, and victory implies peace by definition. Few soldiers are prepared to give their defeated enemies back their weapons, so they can enjoy fighting them again.

In any conflict between X and Y, there are three paths to peace. X can prevail, Y can prevail, or X and Y can agree to leave the battle lines where they are now.

For example, one conflict that has been ongoing more or less since the founding of the postwar world is the Arab-Israeli war. One way to achieve peace in this conflict would be for the Israelis to leave Israel and live somewhere else - such as Guam, perhaps, or West Palm Beach. Another option is for the Israelis to conquer the Arab world plus Iran and compel its submission, installing military governors and teaching Hebrew in the schools, and eventually becoming the new ruling class, like the Manchu in the Qing Dynasty or the Mamelukes in medieval Egypt. And a third possibility is that the Arabs and Israelis could accept the current de-facto borders and leave each other alone.

Peace, in other words, is an ambiguous concept. Since everyone supports peace, claiming to support peace does not communicate information. It conceals information. Thus the mystery.

We know there is such a thing as a pacifist, because they hold marches and such. We know they tend to agree with each other, because we see few pacifist-on-pacifist wars. And it is pretty clear that they're cryptocalvinists. But how can we predict, given a certain conflict, which of the three paths to peace our pacifist will recommend?

My theory is that what pacifists mean by *Peace* is actually the *victory of righteousness*.

The Calvinist doctrine that leads to pacifism is Providence, which is not just the Mafia-ridden slum where I went to college, but also God's plan for the earth. God apparently takes a great interest in affairs down here, and he certainly doesn't want his work to go to waste. Therefore, although his plan is of course mysterious, it tends to favor the victory of good over evil.

If you buy this theory, which was certainly quite popular among the Puritans (Lincoln stated it perfectly when he said "let us have faith that right makes might"), peace cannot be achieved except by the victory of righteousness. If the armies of righteousness fail to prevail, if they experience temporary setbacks, if their tank divisions are cut off and encircled, their bombers shot down and their convoys sunk, this may be a test, but it cannot be the final result. Because God himself has yet to step onto the field. And when he does, buddy, look out.

Therefore, any outcome that is not righteous is a recipe for more war. And therefore, peace and the victory of righteousness are synonymous. Assuming, of course, you believe in Providence. (And assuming you didn't roll a bowling ball down the College Hill bus tunnel.)

This is why pacifism seems to make so little sense. In reality, just like Rawlsian distributive justice, it makes perfect sense. It just depends on a theological doctrine which has long since decayed. If you find arrowheads in an archaeological dig, it does not mean our ancestors went around hurling little chips of stone at each other.

Once we start looking for the arrowshafts, we find them everywhere.

A simple example is the set of disturbances in the US in the 1960s, which included violence by black militants in the inner cities, violence by white KKK activists and other advocates of "massive resistance" in the South, and various riots by students on university campuses.

It's an interesting exercise to reread the contemporary reports on these disturbances - now available for pennies - written by committees of distinguished Brahmin luminaries, such as the Kerner Commission and the Skolnick Report. As Skolnick says:

> Almost uniformly, the participants in mass protest today see their grievances as rooted in the existing arrangement of power and authority in contemporary society, and they view their own activity as political action - on a direct or symbolic level - aimed at altering these arrangements.

Indeed. Of course, much the same could be said for Attila the Hun. And though the observation is no longer fashionable, it's an open secret that the Dalit gangsters of today, who are of course cultural descendants of the Panther types so popular with Skolnick and his ilk, tend to view their crimes as not crime, but resistance.

The general recommendation of all these reports is that since the grievances are clearly righteous, the only way to stop the violence is to resolve the grievances. In other words, to find out what the militants need and give it to them. (As Skolnick puts it, "fundamental social and political change.") Otherwise, since Providence will prevail, any resistance will only lead to more violence.

This recommendation held both for black riots in the inner cities, and for student riots on campus. And both, indeed, were largely successful in achieving the rioters' objectives, at least any that a generous observer could describe as sane. Most Americans today don't realize that the universities they send their children to today are the institutional products of this period of mob violence, or that the bizarre "ethnic studies" departments that feature so prominently in their curricula are essentially an occupying force devoted to maintaining this victory.

Of course, this remedy does not apply to (and these reports did not discuss) the violence of white segregationist militants, such as Sam Bowers and his White Knights. Obviously these gentlemen did not "view their own activity as political action," and their various murders, firebombings, etc, were no more than common crimes. Hate crimes, in fact. Therefore, the FBI needed to be unleashed on them, and it was.

Because when you are resisting the forces of unrighteousness - as I hope we can all agree Mr. Bowers represents - meeting force with force turns out to actually be quite effective. Today in the US there is almost no white paramilitary violence. There is some, but I think you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who believes that if the authorities had listened to the concerns of the KKK, if they had set up social programs for white people who fled inner cities or couldn't afford to send their children to segregated private schools, there would be even less.

The irony of the postwar age is that this reign of global peace, this universalist millennium, was achieved by the Allied victory in the most ruthless war in modern history, in which neither side displayed the slightest respect for enemy civilians. So much for the legitimate revolutionary aspirations of the German people! If violence never solves anything, why is Germany such a pleasant and peaceful place today, even minus a few cathedrals and other flammable bric-a-brac? Why didn't the German people rise in revolt against this brutal military occupation? Well, because that wouldn't have been righteous, of course. And so on.

If you, like me, don't believe in Divine Providence and instead see history as a mere series of events which often exhibit patterns, but certainly no great plan or purpose, what are we to make of pacifists? Should we support them or oppose them? Is the victory of righteousness such a bad thing?

I believe not. I generally support peace of the third kind - formalizing the military status quo. But who can oppose the victory of righteousness? I am all for righteousness. Sign me up.

However, everyone by definition sees his own cause as righteous. And this certainly includes cryptocalvinists. Ultimately, a pacifist is just an activist whose strategy for victory is to suppress the military efforts of his enemies. If you have the same enemies as the pacifist, you are by definition on his side.

For example, the "peace process" in the Near East is over 60 years old as of this writing. In the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, it has created one of the most militaristic societies in human history, certainly surpassing the Imperial Japanese and perhaps even the Spartans, whose tradition of six-year-old suicide hoplites is yet to be discovered. Predation is by far the primary industry of this state, in the form of payments generally referred to as "aid," which appear to be provided in exchange for refraining from violence against the contributors.

A foolish and atheistic person, ignorant of the ways of Providence, might think that the simplest way to resolve this problem would be to persuade Palestine to accept its current borders, refrain from assaulting its neighbors, and devote its obviously impressive energies to horticulture, software engineering, dance, and other peaceful pursuits.

However, there is no chance of this approach succeeding, because the current borders of

Palestine are not just - they are unjust. Therefore, Providence will frown on any attempt to convert the status quo into a permanent peace, and my naive proposal is in fact a recipe for more war, a spasm of pent-up rage from the frustrated national aspirations of the Palestinian people. If these aspirations were unrighteous, they would constitute irredentism and revanchism, but since they are righteous, they are a plea from an oppressed people for the redemption of their stolen lands.

How do pacifists, or cryptocalvinists in general, decide who is righteous and who is not? This is a fascinating question, which I'm afraid we'll have to look at another day.

Universalism: Post-war Progressivism as a Christian Sect 07/17/2007

Apparently there once was a kind of obsolete proto-blog that was called a "book."

A "book" was like a blog except that the author saved up all his posts for a year or two, then dumped them all in one big printout. This product cost thousands of microcredits, and you had to apply to the Department of Facts if you wanted to write one. And even if Facts stamped your party card, you still had to convince Information to promote you, and those who excelled at this gloriously-opaque task tended to make Talleyrand look like Montaigne.

While this sucked really just as much as it sounds, it did have certain advantages. One of them was that your readers were presented with a crisp and structured argument, rather than a great river of instant manure whose color and consistency can vary alarmingly. This was because the "book" could be "revised" and "edited," practices we now consider unethical.

And rightly so, of course. We don't want to return to the past. No one wants that. However, if you write online and you want to speak with any kind of confidence, you have to be able to change your mind. Ideally this is not done by surreptitiously editing the archives, as if one were writing a "book."

As UR readers have been reminded *ad nauseam*, one of my many eccentric opinions is that the tradition to which most sophisticated Westerners of 2007 conform is best seen as a sect of Christianity. Since this tradition sees itself as a pure product of science and reason, neither sectarian nor Christian nor even traditional, my perspective is heretical in the strict sense of the word. We can't both be right.

My argument is that though the tradition is theologically atrophied, its moral and political positions, and its personal and institutional patterns of transmission, identify it as the legitimate modern successor of mainline progressive Protestantism. Since this is only the most powerful branch of Christianity in the most powerful nation on the planet, swallowing its claims of dewy-eyed innocence is a little difficult for me.

This heresy implies a substantial qualitative revision of reality as we know it. For

example, Richard Dawkins considers himself a follower of something he calls "Einsteinian religion," which appears to differ not at all from the aforementioned tradition. From Dawkins' perspective, he is defending reason against superstition. From my perspective, he is prosecuting one Christian sect on behalf of another. Doh.

It's simply unrealistic to expect to be able to make this revision, or even evaluate it fairly, without adjusting the language we use to "frame" the problem. To this end I've field-tested some neologisms, such as ultracalvinism and cryptocalvinism, and also satisfied myself that existing names, such as liberalism, are just as useless and confusing as they seem.

The problem with the neologisms is that they prejudge the argument. It's impossible to make them nonpejorative. Perhaps this tradition-to-be-named is a bolus of ancient, benighted lies, and perhaps its followers are either deluded zombies or unprincipled opportunists who need to be stopped. But the whole point of naming it is to synthesize a "red pill" that we can feed to the former, and no such pill has any reason to be bitter.

So I've decided I like the name Universalism, with a capital U. Most Universalists would accept this name as an improper noun, because after all they consider their beliefs universal. That is, they think everyone should share them, and eventually everyone will. So all they have to swallow is the capital letter. It goes down easily with a sip of water, dissolves quickly in any hot beverage, can be crushed and mixed with applesauce, etc.

Universalism is the faith of our ruling caste, the Brahmins. It's best seen as the victory creed of World War II, and it's easy to connect to the various international institutions born in that victory, which Universalists still regard as sacred if occasionally stained by human frailty, much as an intelligent Catholic sees the Roman Church. (It is not a coincidence that "catholic" and "universal" are synonyms.)

Universalism is actually already the name of a Christian doctrine, the doctrine of universal salvation. This idea, that all dogs go to Heaven and there is no Hell, is best regarded as an extremist mutation of Calvinism, in which everyone is part of the elect. The modern idea of universal salvation comes to us from Unitarian thinkers such as Emerson, and forms the second half of UUism, whose devotees are, needless to say, Universalist to perfection. (It's an interesting exercise to compare the tenets of UUism to those of "political correctness.")

The Universalist synthesis united two American traditions that in the past had sometimes been at odds. One was the ecumenical mainline Protestant movement, exemplified by institutions such as the Federal Council of Churches, whose most daring theologians were moving toward humanism. The other was what might (with homage to Edward Bellamy) be called the Nationalist movement, a vast raft of secular pragmatists, socialists, anarchists, communists, and other reformers, who flocked to the German-inspired university system that developed in the late 19th century, becoming a sort of roach motel for bad ideas.

(One of the most sensible of the Nationalist philosophers, William James, seriously proposed paramilitary forced labor as the cure for all social ills - in 1906. Oh, Billy, if only you knew! And the utopia of Bellamy's enormously-influential Looking Backward (1888) is essentially the Soviet Union.)

While these groups had generally cooperated in the Progressive Era, there were some tensions - for example, over Prohibition, which the secular Nationalists found hard to swallow. These eased substantially in the New Deal, largely due to the brilliant coup in which Progressives captured the Democratic Party, their former opposition, and converted it into an extremist Progressive movement - while repealing Prohibition. FDR even had a book called *Looking Forward* printed under his name.

(Interestingly, both the mainline Protestant and secular Nationalist movements have deep links to the evil John Calvin, ayatollah of Geneva. Mainline Protestantism descends from Calvinism through, of course, the Puritans. The Nationalists were strongly influenced by this tradition as well, in its later Unitarian and Transcendentalist forms, but many also studied in the Prussian university system, where they learned the secular versions of Calvin's divine State propounded by the Genevan Rousseau, and later by Hegel. Death is a master from Germany.)

After WWII, there was no longer any visible quarrel between these factions. Any views which contradicted Universalism became socially unacceptable in polite society. Progressive Christianity, through secular theologians such as Harvey Cox, abandoned the last shreds of Biblical theology and completed the long transformation into mere socialism. Nationalism also becomes an inappropriate term, as with the growth in American power it morphed into internationalism and, as most now call it, transnationalism. Instead of sacralized regional governments, transnationalists want to build a sacralized planetary government - on the principle that, as Albert Jay Nock put it, "if a spoonful of prussic acid will kill you, a bottleful is just what you need to do you a great deal of good."

Creedal declarations of Universalism are not hard to find. I am fond of the Humanist Manifestos (version 1, version 2, version 3), which pretty much say it all. The UN Declaration of Human Rights is good as well. No mainline Protestant will find anything morally objectionable in any of these documents.

In a probably-vain attempt to boil down all this cant, I've defined the four principal Ideals of the creed as *Social Justice*, *Peace*, *Equality* and *Community*. As we've already seen, *Social Justice* means political violence, and *Peace* means victory. We'll get to *Equality* and *Community* shortly.

The latest chapter in this sad and savage story was written in the 1960s, when the first postwar generation came of age. These young men and women had been educated by the Universalist "Establishment" which won the war, and were quite unaware that any serious and intelligent person could disagree with the Universalist consensus. The result was a sort of creeping Talibanization in which the doctrines of Universalism became

constantly more extreme, a process that continues to this day.

Today, perhaps the simplest definition of Universalism is that it's the belief system taught in American universities (at least, Federally funded universities). But, again, it is fundamentally a Christian sect, and its moral and political tenets will find echoes in Massachusetts and upstate New York at any time since the 1830s. Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance, for example, is a satire of hippies - written in 1852. All that's missing is the patchouli.

Universalists, as descendants of Calvin's postmillennial eschatology, are in the business of building God's kingdom on Earth. (The original postmillennialists believed that once this kingdom was built, Christ would return - a theological spandrel long since discarded.) The city-on-a-hill vision is a continuous tradition from John Winthrop to Barack Obama. In Britain, the closely-related Evangelical movement used the term "New Jerusalem," which I'm afraid never really made it across the pond, but expresses the vision perhaps best of all. I always picture the New Jerusalem ("in England's green and pleasant land") as involving a lot of enormous concrete tower blocks, with the Clash's "Guns of Brixton" playing somewhere on someone's ghetto-blaster, and a forty-year-old grandmother screaming at her junkie daughter, but I'm not sure this is how they saw it in the 1890s.

What's really impressive about Universalism is the way in which this messianic teenage fantasy power-trip has attracted, and continues to attract, so many people who don't believe at all in the spirit world, only smoke weed on the weekends, and think of themselves as sensible and down-to-earth. Of course, the belief that all Universalist ideals can be justified by reason alone is a necessary condition. But Christian apologists have been deriving Christianity from pure reason since St. Augustine. You'd think these supposedly-skeptical thinkers would be a little more skeptical.

As a non-Universalist, I can't help but admire the success of this particular replicator. It is brilliantly designed, like the smallpox virus. The fact that no one actually designed it, any more than someone designed the smallpox virus, that it is simply the result of adaptive selection in a highly competitive environment, heightens rather than detracts from my awe.

The coolest thing about Universalism is that it has the perfect opposition. If a Christian who believes his or her faith is justified by universal reason is a Universalist, a Christian who believes his or her faith is justified by divine revelation - in other words, a "Christian" as the word is commonly used today - might be called a Revelationist.

Suppose you have two faiths. Both claim to be absolutely and undebatably true. Faith A tells you it is an ineluctable consequence of reason. Faith B tells you it is the literal word of God. Which is more likely to be accurate?

The answer is that you have no information at all. Perhaps faith B is the literal word of God, but you have no way to distinguish it from something that someone just made up.

Perhaps faith A can be derived from pure reason, but you have no way to know if the derivation is accurate unless you work through it yourself. In which case, why do you need faith A?

In fact, of the two, faith A is almost certainly more powerful and dangerous. As anyone who's majored in Marxist-Leninist Studies knows, it's very easy to construct an edifice of pseudo-reason so vast and daunting that working through it is quite impractical. And this edifice is much more free to contradict common sense - in fact, it has an incentive to do so, because nonsensical results are especially subtle and hard to follow.

Whereas when the word of God contradicts common sense, the idea that it might not actually be the word of God isn't too hard to come by. In other words, if faith A contains any fallacies, they are effectively camouflaged, whereas the "and God says" steps in faith B's syllogisms are clearly marked and brightly colored, and faith B pays a price in skepticism if God's opinion is obviously at variance with physical reality.

So a reasonable observer might guess that, in fact, the tenets of faith B are more likely to be true, simply because it is more difficult for them to get away with being false. But in reality, these derivations tell us nothing. Probably faith A is right about some things, and faith B is right about some others.

However, in the struggle between Universalism and Revelationism, the former always wins. Because the Universalists control the mainstream educational and information system, this is really not at all surprising. But since, as we've seen, it is not rational for a reasonable observer to choose justification by reason over justification by revelation, a political system in which the Universalists are the Globetrotters and the Revelationists are the Generals is almost certain to be one which systematically propagates lies.

We've already seen a few of these lies, and we'll see quite a few more. However, I think the dynamics of the struggle are better illustrated by questions in which, by whatever coincidence, the Universalists are right and the Revelationists are wrong.

For example, because my zip code is 94114, although I am *straight as an iron spear*, I happen to see nothing at all wrong with "gay marriage." In fact I am completely sympathetic to the Universalist view, in which the fact that couples have to be of opposite sexes is a sort of bizarre holdover from the Middle Ages, like the ducking-stool or trial by fire. It's not clear to me why homosexuality, which obviously has some extremely concrete biological cause, is so common in modern Western populations, but it is what it is.

However, because I am straight etc, and also because I'm not a Universalist, I happen to think the issue is not really one of the most pressing concerns facing humanity. And so it occurs to wonder to me how exactly gay marriage became an "issue," when no one twenty years ago even thought of it as a possibility. Whatever the force is that brought this about, I find it hard to imagine anyone describing it as "democratic" with a straight face.

If anyone can come up with an example of a way in which American public opinion has changed in this way, but the change has gone against the Universalists and in favor of the Revelationists, I would certainly be interested to hear it. I think there are a few exceptions - notably in the domain of economics - but they all seem to involve an extremely dramatic intrusion of reality, a force which rarely has any direct impact on American opinion.

[Universalism and Original Sin](#) 07/31/2007

[I'm traveling today, so I took the liberty of pulling this comment by frequent poster Michael S. up to the front page. If you're curious as to the context, see the *Africa Addio* thread. - MM]

I suspect that curious condescension and the myth of the noble savage flow from the most central beliefs of Universalism.

The original theological meaning of universalism was that, at the end of days, no one would be damned - everyone would be saved. This belief was closely associated with early unitarianism, for example that of the Socinians. Universalism is a way of denying that "in Adam's fall/we sinned all." If there was no original sin, there is no need for a Savior, hence unitarianism.

If not by original sin, how, then, are we to explain the moral failings of humanity? If, in a state of nature, man is naturally good, the reason must be (as Rousseau suggested) that the institutions of society are to blame. Get rid of them, and man's inherent goodness will flourish.

The concept of the noble savage and of the corrupting influence of civilization is made much easier to accept by our intimate acquaintance with all the failings of our own social institutions, and our comparative ignorance of those of others. It is easy to see primitive societies as innocent, first because the wish is father to the thought, and secondly, because we don't know that much about them.

Universalism inverts the thesis of Bishop Reginald Heber's famous hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." In Heber's lyrics, the lands of the heathen are described as places where "every prospect pleases/and only man is vile" - because ignorant of Christ's promise to redeem vile men from the original sin that is their portion as heirs to Adam's fall. But, since according to the Universalist view, man is not inherently vile, it is amongst civilized people that every prospect pleases, and only man is vile because of the perverting influence of civilization. Therefore we have a better chance of finding the good amongst peoples who have never been tainted by its poison breath.

The degree to which this view has persisted since the time of Rousseau, despite all the evidence to the contrary, shows the depth of the Universalist faith. The French revolution

alone should have shown Rousseau's theory that sweeping away the old corrupt institutions would inaugurate a return to the Edenic state was a fraud. Still, the same sort of people who pinned their hopes on the Jacobins later pinned them on the Bolsheviks, and on Mao Tse-tung; and they still think Castro's Cuba is a promising experiment, if not a proved one (cf. Michael Moore).

Anthropology is merely another venue for such hopes. Consider how Margaret Mead's Samoa, or the "gentle Tasady" or other false and romantic interpretations of the primitive. Even primate zoology does not escape this. For a long time, chimpanzees, we were assured, shared more DNA with humans than any other species. To be sure, baby chimps are cute and affectionate; but it did not long escape notice that adult ones shared, in addition to DNA, all-too-human tendencies towards territoriality, greed, and violence. Then the primatologists discovered bonobo apes, who supposedly were bisexual, had a communal economy ("it takes a village...") and matriarchal social organization. What could more ideally answer Universalists' fondest hopes? Unfortunately for them, this myth too is now beginning to [crumble](#) (see the most recent [July 30] issue of the New Yorker).

Whatever may be said about some of the beliefs of orthodox Christianity, it seems to me that there is deep insight into the human character in the doctrine of original sin.

Pride, anger, avarice, envy, sloth, gluttony, and lust are fundamental and dominant aspects of human nature, semper et ubique et ab omnibus. They are innate, because they are all in one way or another assertions of self-interest. Consider the squalling infant, who is too young to be sensible to any moral instruction. He thinks only of his own comfort, and never mind his mama's or papa's inconvenience, he wants it NOW! The infant displays six of the seven deadlies - lust alone fails to appear until the onset of puberty.

All of the character traits we admire, such as kindness, honesty, and generosity, by contrast, ane not instinctual in this way; they have to be learnt. It is (among others) the job of civilization to teach them, and that point is one that Universalism fails to acknowledge. It may be the germ of its destruction.