

## Sans Amity, No Truth or Justice

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**ABSTRACT:** Truth is often conceived as a cause of social bonding. Persons so bound may qualify as *truth-holders* (TH) or *truth-seekers* (TS). But neither TH nor TS are bound by *truth*. For neither possession of truth, nor its common pursuit, is *per se* a bond. (I) TH are of opinion they know some *p* is true. Suppose TH1 & TH2, from diverging perspectives, coincide in this. That these judgments coincide is (a) similitude of opinion, not (b) joint action. Similitude of outlook (opinion) is distinct from deliberate accord (bond). One just happens ('is'), the other is willed and embraced ('ought'). Suppose A & B share the correct view that McGee is being judicially killed (lynched). Imagine A as executioner, and McGee as executee. That A & B share this or any belief does not turn them into a team. (II) TS think they do not know if *p* is true, and commit to seek truth by reason of not having it. It follows that TS1 & TS2 cannot know what they pursue, who else is in pursuit, or by what bonds (if any) pursuers are bound. If TS bind themselves one to another, that is a distinct moral act. But a particular truth cannot cause them to bond where they are entirely ignorant of what this truth is. Social justice, should it exist, is grounded in a minimal, even primal, foundation, one of mutual affection among fellow creatures. It is not grounded in an abstract love of truth, whether the latter is sought, or supposedly already known.

**Keywords** Truth; Justice; Amity; Knowledge; Friendship; Discourse

### I. Amity and Indifference

There are three different, yet connected, items of moment to which we must attend. First, there is the pursuit of knowledge, encompassing both truth (judgments of correct, incorrect) and justice (judgments of right, wrong). Second, there is commitment to self-knowledge, or true knowledge of self. Third, there is submission to rational discourse (dialectic), as a means to attaining a surer grasp of truth and justice, and also, as a part of this, achieving reconciliation within homo sapiens.

The question here is whether and how far a commitment to friendship (*philia*, *agape*, and perhaps *eros*) may serve the three ends cited. Does progress in our knowledge somehow depend upon something like, or some element of, friendship?

The argument *pro* runs to the effect that friendship privileges the pursuit of knowledge and self-knowledge, rendering discourse civil, dampening needless contention, enabling optimal dialectical engagement, thus facilitating an order both informed and fair. Clearly it is plausible that friendship may leach attention from obsession with personality. It may erode dogmatic commitment to predetermined and ill-considered conclusions. The idea should be to focus eyes on the prize. And the prize is secured by testing propositions, as distinct from scourging personalities.

The argument contra is not, on its face, implausible. Might not the interposition of friendship, far from assisting in getting at the truth, actually defeat that object, by enveloping veracity in the honey of amity? Might it not, in the end, do more to obstruct than facilitate our capacity to come to grips with truth and justice? To try always to be nice can detract from the austerity and focus that rational deliberation imposes. It is questionable how fair and balanced one can be in assessing the claim that one's good friend – or one's esteemed ancestor, or one's wider community of affection – is or was responsible for mass murder, piracy, extortion, enslavement, rape, whatever... if friend, ancestor, or community has too tight a grip on one's heart.

A prima facie case can be made against friendship (of some sort) as inessential to truth-telling and justice-dealing, just as a case can be made for it to the opposite effect. To make Truth the first firm priority seems to undermine amity. To make amity the first priority seems to erode truth. It may well be that neither amity nor enmity serves the purposes of truth, and that indifference or neutrality does better. Alternatively, it is conceivable that amity, enmity, and indifference all have some role to play. But, if so, what role?

Is indifference or neutrality – a passionless state of mind – most suitable to learning, to analysis, to justice? Is Cool-Hand Luke an apt role model? Is gown best withdrawn from the distractions, the englutissement, of town? Does rationality require to be governed by detachment, in the manner of Spinoza, Hume, or Kant? Or is warmth, compassion, engagement, commitment rather the order of the day, in the style of Voltaire, Rousseau, Bergson, or Martin King? Whatever the case, it is difficult to suppose that all these options, variably pro et contra, can prove of equal weight.

## **2. Proposition & Personality**

Consider the rapport between persons A & B, without assuming that their relationship is friendly, hostile, or indifferent. They happen to be concerned to get at the truth in some matter, and their highest priority is to achieve this end. To do so, they must sustain some at least minimal level of interaction. This relationship between them will be regarded as mutually beneficial, if only in the sense that it helps to secure an outturn both seek – even if they do not desire it in fully equal degree. A question arising, in the relationship, is whether it is important they retain or establish some minimal degree of regard and respect for one another, to assist in achieving their object, and, if so, then how.

The relevant assumption in play is the Aristotelian one, to the effect that two heads are better than one, that some level of open discussion is necessary to get at the truth, or in short that understanding engages a dialogic process. If that is so, then the pertinent question is how such dialogue may be encouraged, and what key errors are best avoided along the way. Of course there shall be many such errors, so the immediate emphasis here is upon one only.

A significant danger in any discussion lies in confounding the proposition being promoted or demoted with the personality of any given agent who backs or contests it. If we are to discuss whether or not species have evolved, as opposed to emerging as instantaneous acts of creation, it will be best not to confound evidence for or against with the personalities of personae contesting. Similarly, if we confront the issue whether it is right that every state (Staat, gobierno), within the limits of its resources, should provide citizens with a social-welfare safety-net, proper procedure dictates we concentrate on the merits of the case and abjure ad hominem attack on opponents as, e.g., ‘bleeding-heart liberals’ or ‘bloodsucking capitalists’.

This distinction – between proposition and person, together with the misdirection that ensues from ignoring it – is well established. We acknowledge that a perfectly decent person need not be correct or sound, as well as that a thoroughly dubious character need not always trim or lie. That we dislike persons does not mean or require they are mistaken or immoral. The devil, after all, if devilish, may still have the best tunes. The opponent, whom we garnish with the garlic and jalapeño of wickedness, need not be illiterate or innumerate. The defense witness, who excites incredulity, may yet be speaking reliably.

Because the truth or justice of any proposition is distinct from the intellectual or moral caliber of the person enunciating it, there is a procedural obligation to avoid lax transition from proposition to personality. The locus classicus of the relevant error might be identified as the so-called Paradox of the Liar, subject to divergent formulations (Martin 1984).

Here, the Martian, M, returning to his planet, proclaims: ‘All Martians are liars’. The absurd effect, apparently, is such that, if what M says is true, it is false; and if what M says is false, it is (apparently) true. But let’s spin this out a touch: If it is true that all Ms are liars, and if M makes that claim, then at least this Martian, M, is not a liar. If it is false that all Ms are liars, and if M declares per contra that they are, then this particular M is a liar. There is no true paradox since the fact that this M is a liar does not imply that all Ms are.)

All the same, the apparent absurdity derives from insertion of the identity of the speaker. We have only to strip that out, and any aura of paradox is dispelled. The proposition is left, nudely, to its own resources, a king sans ermine and crown. The proposition, ‘All xs are ys’, is now in deflationary mode, a disinvestment that leaves the simpler claim to be assessed as merely true or false. We are led from concern with the identity of the speaker, M, to concern with the reliability of the proposition. Thus do we underscore the gap between horse (p) and rider (she who enunciates p).

To fail to observe the distinction between proposition and person does not always produce what is loosely called a paradox. But it always constitutes a category mistake, in which a proposition of one logical type is confounded with a significantly alien alternative. In that confusion, the merit of a proposition (e.g., ‘the heliocentric theory beats the geocentric’, or ‘to prohibit gay marriage is unjust’) is overridden by a quite different concern – with psychology and personality. Should

we neglect the 'proposition v. personality' distinction, we facilitate dramatic slippage, in which a probe of one is merged with a probe of the other. That opens onto the inflammatory needling of the character of contestants.

Apart from a category mistake, there is also, on one reading, simple self-contradiction. If the object is really to get at the truth, then resort to any procedure that predictably deflects from that aim – provoking anger, dislike, and distrust into the bargain – is on its face irrational and self-defeating. It is usually far simpler (if still difficult) to attend to the logical or empirical merits of a proposition, than to elucidate the true motives prompting those who back it. Anyone, accordingly, who truly seeks to establish the truth of a claim, militates against that objective where immediately confusing it with questions to do with the character or bona fides of its proponents. The imperative must be to erect barriers against melding the rational merit of the idea with the moral quality of those who sponsor it.

There is no need to gild lilies, nor entertain counsels of perfection. It is only necessary to accept that the motives of others matter, though not necessarily in every case, and not usually as a matter of the highest priority. Given that motives matter, it must concern us to anticipate, and guard against, gratuitously misunderstanding them. It is objectively difficult for persons even to understand their own motives. It is a difficulty that prompts an array of priests, fortune-tellers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and consultants – not to speak of intimate friends – to apply their skills in servicing the need.

If motives are too frequently misperceived even by those who own them, if massive hurdles present even to the one mind seeking to make sense of self, then the task of penetrating the intentions of others must prove so much the more challenging. The bare propositional issues are daunting enough: questions of climate change, clean energy, air pollution, health care, space travel, etc. The prior obligation of the interlocutor must surely consist in exploring the issues, well in advance of entering into the possible motivational drives of advocates.

In the Buddhist *Dhammapada* (v.103), it is claimed that the man who masters self is a greater hero than the warrior who slays thousands. In The New Testament, Matthew (vii, 1-4) enjoins adepts to "judge not, that ye be not judged". The apparent ground for this is that the self has excessive difficulty in making out its own defects, and best discards obsession with the defects of others. Polonius (in Hamlet), performing platitudinous splits, instructs his son, Laertes, to attend "above all" to his own conscience and integrity (act I, scene 3), just as Laertes (earlier in the same scene) advises his sister, Ophelia, to be wary of Hamlet's conscience and integrity – his promises – in that "his will is not his own". If Hamlet is subject to forces that lie beyond his control, and cannot master himself, then neither can he know himself, or be true to himself, or indeed to her.

Minds, even as they converge at their tips, at the apices formed by propositions, are otherwise divergent and incommensurable, like an array of spiders, each in the vast interior of its own deeply webbed space. We are familiar with the proverb, in speech and song, that "people living in glass houses should not throw stones". This and other such formulae emphasize as a primary objective the need to make sense of the self and of its motivations, rather than excoriating others

and theirs. In all this, a premium is placed upon self-knowledge. *Nosce te ipsum*. And that inclination speaks, even if indirectly, to the need to privilege the modesty of propositions over the inflationary blasts and counter-blasts excited by personalities.

Minds touch and interact at the spear-tips formed by propositions, express or inferred. It is these propositions that constitute the first order of business. As they roll out, they reflect several grades and statuses. The most relevant and demanding of these here are three: facts, logic, and norms. To avoid misdirection in argument, as regards broad matters of fact, or general questions of social and political direction, it becomes crucial to avert slippage from the high ground of truth and justice claims, into the bog of *ad hominem* characterization – as where we attribute corruption, malevolence, and worse to claimants. The procedural and moral conclusion to which the argument returns is the importance of separating out disputing personalities from disputed proposals.

Having said all that, it does not follow that she who bears an animus towards an interlocutor, and who transfers that animus to the interlocutor's ideas, is necessarily wrong to oppose those ideas. Marx (1847) seemed perfectly contemptuous of Proudhon the man. But the dismissal of so many of Proudhon's economic ideas as 'utopian' constituted no glaring error. On the other hand, to oppose a set of ideas due merely to dislike of the persona articulating them, is in se irrational and untenable, and is best avoided, no matter that the proclivity is 'human, all too human'. Even if the conflation of thinker with thought does not automatically impose error, the avoidance is inadvertent – *il s'agit du medicin malgré lui* – and it is certainly of no assistance in attempting to clear the forest canopy and 'let the sun shine in'.

Where one can clearly show a proposition to be mistaken, and the mistake to be systemic, one is properly positioned to attend to possible reasons for the error and for its consistency, which reasons may take one into the typically murky waters of psychology and personality – but not otherwise. Propositions come first. Personality comes second (if at all). And the pertinence of the latter emerges only where the first (the core issue) has been given its due.

It is assumed, if A & B are in search of the truth, and if they must in any degree rely upon one another to validate or uncover it, that their quest is assisted if they resist the inclination to collapse concerns with propositions into concerns with personae. The summary rationale for this is that to collapse the two may produce an aura of paradox, in any event generates a category mistake, and on one assumption involves the absurdity of self-contradiction. If it is important to avoid such confusion, the question is how best to do so. Is friendship of relevant assistance in avoiding absurdity?

We approach the following suppositions and a question that hangs from them. Suppose (first) dialogical opposition between A & B, whether friends or not. Suppose (second) that A & B are not in fact on friendly terms. Suppose (third) that A & B are 'unfriendly' minimally by way of being indifferent to amity, and possibly antipathetic to friendship in se (as impertinence). How likely are

such persons, bereft of, or indifferent to, friendship, to confound opposition-to-proposition with antipathy-to-personality?

### **3. Indifference & Enmity**

Is it possible that not being on friendly terms, and not engaging amicably, induces actors to exaggerate intellectual (propositional) difference? Might it be that getting at the truth is more difficult where the disputant has no affection – which may take on the color of non-respect or disesteem – for him whose ideas are contested? If there is no underlying friendliness, A may assume that B's intentions, as these relate to A, are more malevolent than benign, and push back for the sake of personally opposing B. We know that competition can be fruitful, but we know, too, that it can be destructive.

It is often observed, as a pragmatic issue, that lack of respect and regard for one's opponent is poor policy, since it causes the opponent's capabilities to be underestimated, unintentionally setting the stage for defeat at her hands. More importantly, where A displays indifference to B (a peer, colleague, or rival) this may excite in B the thought that 'there be dragons', and that the operative dragon may be A. Should that occur, what is observed is a diversion of time and energy from some core exercise to peripheral fire-drills, from tackling what matters to containing the irrelevance of demonization and witch-hunting. In such circumstances it may become difficult for B properly to attend to the question, 'Is x a sound course of action to take', due to noises-off, as generated by the worry, 'Is A arguing against my proposal in order to undermine me?'

Persons do not 'naturally' cohere. They occupy distinct mental universes. Their imaginations, if not assuaged, may diverge and rocket away at warp speed. Belief, conspiracy, foreboding, fear: all litter the Unmilked Way. When people enter into one's domain, call it 'neighborhood', looking unknown, meaning suspicious, one greets them in a friendly manner and offers assistance. Thus may they be pointed in some happier direction. This is not to invade and oppress. It is to speak and to connect. To fail to dock into the wanderer's mind may be to let it spin out of control. Hence witchcraft, the casting of spells, ghosts, apparitions, and angst of every kind. Openness and amity often staunch the hemorrhaging of fear and perhaps calamity.

Plato contends that youngsters treat argument "as a form of sport", and that they "delight like puppies at tugging and tearing" (Republic, VII.539). Is the competition involved in all this abandoned in adulthood? Is it just a matter of high spirits that come with youth? Argument is a species of mental gymnastics, an exercise valuable in its own right. Is such competition wrongly stultified by lingering sentiments of friendship? Is friendship in such a context coruscating and should it be dissolved, like rust on a hinge?

Alternatively, if competition is taught as autonomous and self-justifying, if it is abstracted from underlying and ongoing ties, does that pose a danger to prospects of mutual understanding, peaceful conciliation, and productive cooperation? We shall allow the danger that attends

conferring upon competition an autonomous legitimacy. Without contesting the innocence of some cases of pure adversarial concentration – as e.g. in chess, tennis, bridge, or ping pong – it is sensible never to downplay a pure and evil-tending obsession with winning, with coming out on top, with unbridled assertions of self, that may displace all else, to become all in all: devil take the hindmost.

To inculcate the norm of winning at any cost has an obvious down-side. It involves demoting the value – placing a lower priority on the principles – of empathy and trust in civil society and beyond. Arguably, fellow citizens and co-residents risk great hurt to self and system where friendship is eroded, where that erosion places a damper on civic trust, and where this inhibits mutual aid. If friendship fuels trust, and trust facilitates honest debate, and honest debate is crucial to rational resolution of difference, then to prize the underlying motive of friendship from the overarching practice of competition – whether in sport, business, corporate behavior, education, medical practice, or elsewhere – may greatly endanger the establishment or maintenance of democratic norms.

Suppose that non-friendly disputant A adopts the hypothesis  $p$ , and non-friendly disputant B adopts the hypothesis  $\text{not-}p$ , such that each owns a primary loyalty to  $p$  or to  $\text{not-}p$ , not a prior and primary loyalty to and respect for A or B. The prospect of rational argument seems more likely to break down, where the countering of  $p$  is assimilated as an attack upon A, and where countering  $\text{not-}p$  reads off as an attack on B. We must assume that we assist in the preservation of rationality where able to divorce ‘contesting the thesis’ from ‘attacking the man.’ Where we are less able to make that distinction, or where we merely fail to do so, we can infer an increased likelihood of various sorts of absurdity. The friendship principle is no doubt valid in itself. But does it not also serve as a useful foundation to the competitive search for truth? The lack or loss of such a limiting principle surely increases prospects of research becoming venomous, distracted, misdirected, or thwarted altogether.

Certainly enmity, and perhaps indifference and neutrality, too, ought to be mitigated in order to avoid perverse and unwanted effects. How that is done is another matter, and may be worked out case by case. In earlier times, in boxing for example, even when pugilists like Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries (1910), or Joe Louis and Max Schmelling (1938), were expected to demolish one another, they were still instructed, as the most minimal of gestures, to affirm an underlying mutuality and sympathy, by way of shaking hands or touching gloves as the bout began. Contemporary boxing, especially the all-in, mixed-martial-arts variety, appears to have regressed into a remarkably permissive brutality, in which every residual nicety is abandoned, opening onto an infernal regime of kicking, wrestling, and choking, along with the antecedent slugfest.

In American football (gridiron), members of the New Orleans team (the Saints) were rebuked and penalized (2012) for deliberately fomenting unnecessary and disabling hits on opponents. Saints players who inflicted significant injury on their opponents, with a view to removing them from play, were awarded substantial bonuses by their handlers. Such competition has nothing to

do with bringing out the best in oneself or fellow contestants. The exclusive object appears merely to be to win. Indeed, such an attitude is widely inculcated. And this is where sports competition merges with war, competitors lose the sense of fellow players as bearers of value, entente ceases to be cordiale, and the other is denied the benefit of any residual and underlying regard.

In such ways may team sports now follow the example increasingly set by politicians, who, as in the British Parliament, may wish to abandon the quaint, but mutually respectful practice, of referring to one another as ‘the honorable’ this or that, to trade abuse instead. As in the case of former Prime Minister David Cameron at Westminster (May, 2012), members may not only think of their opponents as ‘idiots’, but actually call them that, in the hearing and under the gaze of the Speaker, who, in his wisdom, resorts to rebuke of only the mildest and most transient sort.

The level of incivility and mutual antipathy in American politics has sharply accelerated over the past thirty years. Not since the Cold War era and the repugnant excesses of the late (Sen.) Joe McCarthy has such rancor been on display. This is especially evident in talk radio, which is archly ideological, painfully bereft of any notion of fairness and balance in presentation and argumentation, and characteristically lacking in respect for persons, unless they be allies. (There is no longer a ‘fairness’ rule, nor any persuasive prospect of its return).

Even the American Supreme Court, certainly in the period leading up to the death of Justice Antonin Scalia (February 2016), has never been more partisan, as on issues of campaign finance (*Citizens United v. FEC*), capital punishment (*Roper v. Simmons*), and abortion (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*). It is arguable that political partisanship on the Court is a hardy perennial. But the proud and vocal ideological bent of justices like Scalia, Alito, and Thomas has been unusual. Donald G. Stephenson, in his 1999 book on Campaigns and the Supreme Court, allows, over the entire history of the Court, that “partisan involvement has been intermittent, not constant” (p.x). The current Court – Justice Kennedy excepted – almost reflexively divides along strict party lines (Coyle 2013, Biskupic 2010, Dworkin 2008).

In court pleadings, it matters that counsel may suppose that they shall be heard with at least some modicum of sympathy, and that justices are possessed of a ruminative organ capable of a degree of open-minded attentiveness. There is no strain in conceding that gross animosity directed towards contestant A or B, by an authority adjudicating their differences, is presumptively prejudicial to prospects of fairness. But the question is whether the ideal of an ‘open-mind’ goes awry where clambering upon the ice floes of mere indifference or neutrality. Where this holds – where confronted with or possessed by dispositions of mere indifference or neutrality vis-à-vis the claims and interests of others – need we to reconsider the odds of securing an optimally objective truth?

Is it possible to commit to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but, if we are depthlessly indifferent to, and wrung dry of sympathy for, those whose claims we examine? Suppose a Supreme Court justice, to avoid unfairness, recuses self from hearing a case in which that justice’s son pleads as solicitor-general. The sensible rationale informing such recusancy is that the judge’s



affection for a near relation may prejudice, or only appear to prejudice, his evenhandedness in adjudicating the claims of an unrelated litigant. But is it not possible that the judge's lack of affection, empathy or regard for either party may also prejudice the rightness and fairness of the outcome?

May there not be very good reason for a judge to be recused from hearing cases, not just where she has a dog in the fight, but equally where she doesn't, and where there may be evidence of her perfect indifference to the welfare of any of the contestants engaged? May it not be right for judges to be recused from hearing any cases, perhaps of the poor, gays, women, or aliens, for whom they may entertain no persuasive or even plausible concern? Absent good will, and some element of genuine civic empathy, it may be doubted there can be assurance of truthfulness or justice in conciliatory public deliberations of any sort.

Has it been the case – is it still the case – that the claims of women writers are less likely to be valued by male counterparts (misogyny)? With Feminism, have (some) women turned the tables, to give as good as got? Are the claims of black writers less likely to be valued by their white peers (racism)? Do the claims of Black Power, and its progeny, such as Black Lives Matter, respond overmuch in tit for tat? Are the arguments of Arab writers less likely to be accorded their due by Western intellectuals (cultural nationalism)? Does the riposte of 'Orientalism', of Islamic renewal, even of terrorist extremism, partly or largely constitute a response in kind?

An old study of Harvard students claimed these to lend greater credence to the theses of lecturers who address them in formal attire (coat and tie) than to lecturers turned out more casually. External and unrelated perceptions and impressions may readily, as in such a case, distract the mind of the observer – perhaps juror, police officer, student, or teacher – from central questions in play. Karl Popper argued in his seminars for putting the strongest positive reading on any text one proposes to counter.

In trials, where there is presumption of innocence until guilt is proven, similar constraints are imposed. The practice of trial by jury, where the jury is one of peers, is designed to secure that an empathetic baseline is met. There is a problem of unfairness and a risk of injustice where the nobleman is tried by the peasant (as in the French Revolution) or the villein by the lord of the manor (as in the Dark Ages). Defense counsel seeks to present clients in as favorable a light as possible: suiting up male clients is standard. It is but another way of inducing jurors to view defendants, less with regard or even respect, than with (perhaps?) affection. The object certainly is to dissolve hostility and indifference. That jurors sympathize with the defendant does not ensure she shall be freed. But some minimal fellow feeling seems requisite for hearings to be fair.

To dislike the accused certainly cannot help; it can certainly give no boost to fairness in disposing of the case. But idle indifference to the accused may prove equally menacing, and work no better. The late Harper Lee wrote a singular novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). This, like Margaret Mitchell's very different book, *Gone With The Wind* (1936), garnered a Pulitzer Prize. In Lee's

book, the innocent defendant, Tom Robinson, whether met with the jury's forthright enmity, or mere indifference, still ends as a corpse. Lee's narrative is uncannily similar to, and is likely to have been drawn from, the life and death of Willie McGee. (Heard 2010)

In a shared world, with shared understandings, but bereft of any community of affection or empathy, Tom is condemned to death. He is literally 'terminated with extreme prejudice', in CIA parlance. Somewhat in the manner of Machiavelli's Remirro de Orco, Tom serves as a minatory example, except for being cut up by bullets, not swords. In real life, as much as in Tom's fictional case, there are countless instances in which the truth or justice of proposals is carelessly trashed by agents who withhold common identity and affective proximity from those who stand in the dock, and whose interests lie diced on the block.

If we are reliably to explore positions we do not initially defend, it may well be that we require to do more than observe indifference to proponents whom we counter. In Suzanne Collins' novel, *The Hunger Games*, we attend to a dystopian America (Panem, though it should have been Pandem, as in pandemonium), in which 24 selected youths, from divergent regions, are compelled to fight to the death, only one of whom ultimately survives, this survivor being richly rewarded, but strictly as an individual. There is no proper civil society in Panem. The disadvantaged are mutually opposed and distrustful and have no means of coordination. They are subject to the control of a wily elite, who regularly convene Romanic games as diversion, punishment, crowd control, and mob management.

The elite of Collins' Panem are elegant, bordering on gaudy, certainly cynical and manipulative. They entertain no affection for their subjects and ensure that these entertain no affection for one another. There is no transparency, no direct and certifiable truth, certainly no justice. The individualism and egoism of Panem are married to the poverty and oppression of the mass. Panem betrays the stark dependency of the poor and their utter alienation from one another. The rulers of Panem have been taught not to care for the poor; the poor have been taught not to care for one another. Hence the mass has no apparent future. In the loss of any extensive amitié entre eux, it has lost trust, resourcefulness, and (with the possible exception of Collins' heroine, Katniss Everdeen) any ability to mobilize against Panemic despotism.

The transactions peculiar to Panem are notable for showmanship and hucksterism. With no amity or mutuality, there is no space for resistance to pervasive, despotic, high-tech surveillance. The Collins fantasy constitutes a notable advance over the clever chicanery of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Collins does not directly characterize Panem as an acerbic version of her own country. But to some, her fiction serves to underscore an actual state of affairs. The question presses: Can we enjoy meaningful public dialogue, in pursuit of truthful and just outcomes, if we remain merely indifferent, let alone hostile, to the promotion of friendship *qua* virtue in modern mass society?

Modern governance has largely grown into a matter of mass management of unrelated and alienated citizens. The portrait of the mass in Alexis de Tocqueville (1835-40), or J. S. Mill (1859), and later by figures like Ortega y Gasset and Gustave Le Bon, communicates a threat. It is by

organized Untermenschen vis-à-vis outnumbered Übermenschen. But by the time we reach the down escalator of David Riesman et al. (1950) in *The Lonely Crowd*, a crowd that Robert Putnam (2000) now depicts as *Bowling Alone*, we are in a place more diminished even than Lilliput. For the little men are littler still; they are no longer a threat; they have been emasculated; they have lost collective 'mojo' – meaning they have lost their jobs, communities, and sense of belonging. They are now denigrated, less for their supposed violence and might, than for their supposed torpor and fecklessness, consistent with loss of, and indifference to, liberty.

To think to get at truth and justice, via mere indifference and affective neutrality – when in the vice of a globalized world that sharpens the edge of difference and packs alterity into contiguity – seems unpersuasive. Is it really reasonable, in our global circumstances, to think that privileging indifference and neutrality, excluding an affective dimension to civil society, can marshal effective and systematic protection of free expression, civic engagement, and minimally equitable distributions? Modern individualism and libertarianism may be running their course, in the sense of running up against the outer limits of plausibility. Failure to renew engagement with ancient, amicable, urban motifs may prove portentous.

Present individualist and bureaucratic arrangements seem to be heading down multiple culs-de-sac. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these is terrorism, global of course, but also domestic. Another is a widening gap, material and psychic, domestic and international, between socio-political strata (Desmond 2016, Bailey & Danziger 2015, Harrington 2013, Cassidy 2010). A third is accelerating statist violation of civil liberties and the imposition of authoritarian security regimes throughout the developed world, as underscored by the American Patriot Act (Sagar 2014, Greenwald 2014, Harris 2010). A fourth is accelerating structural unemployment, especially in developed states.

One edgy development we observe in the USA is recrudescing rural nativism, conjoined with volatile anti-immigrant sentiment. What emerges here is the vision, shadow, or specter of grown folk, fearful and angry, in survivalist mode, quitting cities, running for the hills. They are armed like banditos; foregathering in the wilds of Mr Cheney's northwest; in Montana and the Dakotas; restoring patriarchy, as in the Texas of Waco (1993) and Eldorado (2008); seeking to militarize and verticalize discourse; mouthing irrational and hateful diatribe; promoting security in self-sufficient, Robinson Crusoe-esque enclaves; overflowing with religious enthusiasm; addicted to the rich sauce of Ayn-Rand-like libertarianism; perhaps gearing up for Timothy McVeigh-like attacks upon government and its urban redoubts (Oklahoma City, April, 1995); and buoyed in all this by growing numbers of disaffected associates. Islamic terror in the West is of course to be contended with. But home-grown varieties merit serious attention.

That such violent nativism is not merely American is obvious, as illustrated by cases in Britain, Australia, France, Spain, and elsewhere. One striking non-American example is supplied by the July 2011 mass murderer, Anders Behring Breivik. Amply provisioned with guns and bombs, at a site under 20 miles (32 kms) from Oslo, this gunman made his contribution to cleansing modern

Norway of its burdensome ethnic and ideological complexities. Breivik was hugely successful in this endeavor, as measured by his slaughter of 93 innocents. He was the very model of a modern, disaffected, country gent. He abided alone on a farm, and, in this redoubt, easily circumvented strict Norwegian gun-control laws. He hated the left, was a racial supremacist, an Islamophobe, and maintained contact over a period of years with UK right-wing extremists (Guardian, 25 July 2011).

Party political coloring in such a case is not indicative. The most violent political extremism of the 1970s in Germany (Baader-Meinhof) and Italy (Brigate Rosse, or Red Brigades) was left-wing. Religious identity is no more salient. The terrorism of the Irgun Zvai Leumi and of the Stern Gang (Lohamei Herut Yisrael), in Palestine (1930s and 1940s) against British rule, was Jewish and pro-Zionist. That terrorism has become so widely associated with Islam has less to do with Islam, qua religion, than with the destabilizing and power-shifting impact of globalization as the cutting edge of the modern liberal project, though the strictly religious/ideological component in the mix is not to be downplayed.

Historically, terrorism is not new. What is new is increasing uptake on this tactic by non-state actors, which has in turn to do with (1) ever-increasing global concentrations of power/wealth; (2) agglutination of myriad others (ideological, religious, and ethnic) in a single planetary market place; (3) infirm acceptance of wider and more cosmopolitan identities; (4) ready availability to quite ordinary persons of commonplace items with hugely destructive force (fertilizer, batteries, trucks, guns, planes, etc); (5) the steady and significant decline of civic concern with mutuality, recognition, and fellowship. (King 2008)

#### **4. Positioning Truth Categorially**

J.S. Mill took the view that truth is frail and susceptible to asphyxiation. He claimed “the dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution” is a pleasant absurdity “which all experience refutes.” Mill had no doubt that Christianity, had it been persecuted more severely (a genuine option despite the circus bloodletting of the Coliseum), “might have been extirpated in the Roman Empire” (On Liberty, Ch. 2). Mill’s view was relatively novel. It stands in opposition to the historically dominant paradigm.

Mill did not follow figures like William Hazlitt (d.1830) in thinking “death cancels everything but truth”, and was contradicted by Coventry Patmore (d. 1896), who intoned:

When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;

The truth is great and shall prevail.

Thus, figures like Hazlitt and Patmore articulate the dominant view. Mill, especially in his time, was plainly deviant. Patmore directly dipped his bucket in the book of Esdras (second of the

Apocrypha) and drew from it. The Vulgate, in lapidary Latin, predicates the standard lore: *Magna est veritas et praevalet*. ('Truth is great and it prevails', or more sternly, it shall prevail.) This is far from being a merely nineteenth-century view. Witness Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1967) in *Sur l'Amour*, where he insists that "whatever is more true prevails; whatever is better comes about in the end". ("Car tout ce qui est plus vrai se trouve; et tout ce qui est meilleur finit par arriver.")

Such a view, often, perhaps usually, intends that some accepted view or orthodoxy, dominant in the present, is immune to any breach in its ascendancy, and will survive against all comers. It is the sort of view that is an historical commonplace. Certainly the teleology and eschatology of Hebraic, Christian, and Muslim orthodoxy all unwaveringly promote the notion that the particular version each entertains of truth is divine, haloed, inalterable, irresistible, and final. That proclivity cleanly reaches beyond Abrahamic instances and takes on an elevated, and almost interstellar, quality. Zoroastrian priests under Xerxes in the 5th century BC, Roman priests under Caesar in the 1st century AD, their Egyptian counterparts under Cleopatra in the same era, all reflect a presumption and aura of indestructibility. No such cohort readily conceives, let alone believes, that its own ideology – in these cases religious, but not only that – may come, swiftly and completely, to be effaced and replaced.

The historically dominant paradigm favors the idea that what is now, shall endure. It embraces the idea that this is truth and that truth will vanquish falsity; that truth is autonomously capable of imposing itself; that truth does not in any way depend upon the intervention, whim, or will of mortals; and that the common recognition of, or acquiescence in, truth, is capable of generating peace and installing order – perhaps soon, perhaps late, but certainly 'in the end'. The notion of truth is never far from that of justice, nor justice from order. Insistence upon truth as autonomous is one way of promoting order as natural. So if truth imposes itself, is autonomic, is given; and if social order (as ideal or good) emerges from it; then this emergent order is also natural, superhuman, a golden bough – if suspended somewhat above mere mortal reach.

The modern era has not fully thrown off, and perhaps no era ever shall, such elegant and reassuring optimism – or naïveté. Hobbes and Kant are two singular personages who appear (in different ways) to hold that a prior commitment to truth should suffice to engineer reconciliation among disputants. Hannah Arendt (1967) adopts a partly similar position, where she contends that truth "possesses a strength of its own"; that it can be defeated but not replaced; that, more than non-political, it is anti-political; that among its most prominent avatars are state-appointed judges, and academics, such as herself. Arendt does not oppose truth-telling to falsity, or to error; she opposes it to lying. And she holds the liar to be "a man of action" which, she thinks, "the truth-teller... most emphatically is not". On such a view, truth is granitic, inflexible; subject to temporary entombment, not complete erasure; lies outside politics; but is foundational to, while serving to constrain, politics.

The difficulty is that we never know truth in se. We only know those of its iterations we imagine to be true. So how autonomous can the commitment to truth actually be, however innocent our motives in seeking its recuperation? It seems less probable that truth shall yield order than that order shall yield truth. The prime virtue among humans must, in any event, be Amity. And this must be the Grundnorm, the ethical foundation, of Order, and of Truth. It is less the case that Amity trumps Truth, than serving it as an indispensable condition.

It is humans who represent the most potent threat to themselves, to their own survival, as well as to the survival of other creatures. To survive, they must first seek among themselves to settle upon fair and effective socio-political arrangements. That is the base from which other forms of enquiry and exploration commence. In that sense, order precedes truth, as amity precedes order, and politics, science. Human order is not a genetic given within the species but an artificial or fabricated system of rules or understandings that change over time and space. And that is one reason why the enlightened capacity for compromise is so valuable, and bullet dogmatism so full of holes.

That the greatest threat to humans is almost always other humans is approximately elementary. The MAD doctrine (mutually assured destruction) dramatically instantiates the position in the arena of international relations. Even the mania of terrorism, and even if we accede to it as the 'tactic of the weak', dotes on mass apocalyptic self-immolation. And there is ample opportunity for terror via multiple WMD (weapons of mass destruction), weapons increasingly easily assembled and deployed. Religiosity often encourages the distressed more to end life than extend it.

Only humans appear capable of imagining Utopia, Heaven, Valhalla, Elysium, Arcadia, Nirvana, and the like. In Sanskrit, 'nirvana' is a blowing out, as of light, and is perfectly apt. It is a singular illustration of how dreadfully inconvenient, for all its wonders, the human imagination can be. It is sometimes perfectly happy, even enthused, to reflect that life on earth doesn't matter. It can contemplate with composure, even ecstasy, the notion that life can be, and moreover ought to be, extinguished and abandoned. The human imagination often delights, even literally swoons, at the thought of trading places. This is to swap earth for the empyrean, to exchange corporeal form for soulful repositioning among the stars, to sidle in amidst jorums of honey and nectar, to relocate at the right hand of God, to nestle in the laps of vestal virgins, to commingle with a glorious host who congregate in the celestial 'by and by'.

The intra-specific threat to survival does not only hold among humans. It is instantiated among virtually all mammalian (together with many other) species, as much herbivore as carnivore. Still, the case among humans is peculiar, indeed unique. For humans are exceptional in posing as much a threat to other species as to themselves. Trans-specific human predation reflects exceptional intensity, accomplished global scope, together with an accelerating, extra-planetary Wanderlust. It is the human imagination, so potent, that proves so destabilizing, so threatening, in science as in religion (religion arguably just being an earlier iteration of science).

Only the concern to survive (not an imaginative constant among humans) dictates the need for homo sapiens sapiens to devise forms of, and means to, mutual conciliation. The survival imperative is not, as Hobbes intends, a mere matter of fact. Rather, within limits, it is a moral imperative, which humans – more than most – are too readily disposed to flout, to the point indeed of inhumanity. Humans are under compulsion, though not genetic, to devise solutions. They must invent their own electrical circuits, because lightning will not do this for them. They must make the connections themselves, precisely because lacking any hard wiring that directly, naturally, and of itself fills the behavioral void.

If human imaginations are to be conciliated they must somehow be assembled, perhaps in counsel, as at Nicaea (325), or Chalcedon (451), or Trent (1545), and even via Twitter, Tweet, Facebook, and other varieties of internet commingling. Humans do not readily agree upon the truth. They do broadly agree upon the need for peace. (The pig in this ointment is their studied incapacity quite to concoct acceptable terms of peace.) And Order, Peace, will not impose itself. If 95 theses of right conduct are to be nailed to the church door at Wittenberg, it must be by grubby human hand. The primary order of business among humans cannot be to beat about and through the bush. It cannot be to lay bare the Truth of nature's relentless infinity. It has to be, from the outset, to establish base camps of equity and amity.

Near the top of any human agenda is the decoction of order. Some will say this is to exaggerate, given that each infant is born into a world already ordered, and thus has neither need nor capacity to manufacture broad social arrangements. But this allusion to the power of tradition is inadequate. The point is not that each new agent (in toto and de novo) must or can manufacture his or her own order. The point rather is that every human order, even if chaotically and cantankerously evolved over time, is still cobbled into being by human hand and mind. Humans, sans consciously constructed order, could never transcend their pre-human state. And it is this order that serves as the only possible foundation for pursuit of truth.

Because securing a peaceful order is such a burdensome, chaotic, and often murderous business, many if not most are concerned to avoid the challenge. It may be convenient to pretend this is not a need requiring to be met. There is some attraction in the contention that a fair and peaceful order already exists, or pre-exists, as in some sacred text, magically carved on tablets of gold, or exquisitely printed on papyrus or hide. The goodness and justice of any current order may be regarded as plainly broadcast in the revolutions of the stars, in the regularity of the seasons, even in model social behavior presented by other species, and ultimately by the very gods, if not imparted by elusive, UFO-borne extra-terrestrials, perhaps from Uranus, or from points still more distant and toxic. In all such cases, the contention is that a just order among humans is externally grounded, and is owed to non-human agency.

So it is alluring to envisage disposing of the issue of order by conceiving it as natural or given or autonomic, as an arrangement not of our making, and managed by forces that lie wholly beyond our ken. Where order is conceived as externally imposed, as the gift of a Source that cannot be

refused, no need for dialogue subsists, only dogma. The most persuasive dogma is that which insists that the shape of social order owes nothing to the pen or palette of any human hand. Dogma is persuasive by stripping the question of (human) status and command from that of order: 'Thy will, not mine, be done'. To distance the effect (human community) from its cause (human imagination) lends it an enhanced and more authoritative aura.

Where humans devise order, as they must, and where that is at its most dogmatic, it is tempting to pretend that mere humans are not its source, and that this order cannot be of their making. In the Jean Giraudoux play, *La Guerre de Troie n'Aura pas Lieu*, a messenger breaks in on the conference between Hector and Helen, to declare the finding of the priests, which is that the gods oppose the peace. To this, Hector interjects: "It is curious how, in difficult cases, the gods decline to speak for themselves" (1962: Act I, Sc. 9). Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, in *The Brothers Karamozov* (1879-80), is a mediator between divinity and humanity. He presides over crucial, arcane conventions, whose celestial source and justification, to a motley human crew, are not on view. Moses does not invent the law; it is revealed to him, given to him; and his power derives from his intermediacy; it derives from his role as a gatekeeper. Jesus, on the one hand, is the messenger of the Lord; on the other, of course, he is The Lord.

Mohammed's role, by contrast, avoids so confusing an issue, as to whether he actually is divine, or just an operator who has God online. He is fashioned in the mold of Moses, or Abraham, or John the Baptist, or (better) David: warrior king. Mohammed's plain man's role is that of simple intermediary. Mohammed presides over a truth. It is not his truth. He is a go-between. And he conveys a message from One otherwise inaccessible to *hoi polloi*. One such as Joseph Smith is then conventional in following this same path. He is yet another intermediary; he is a witness to a power that lies beyond human ken. Smith does not make up the Book of Mormon; he merely recovers it from some recondite and ineffable Source. He fashions no truth. That is above his paygrade. But it is something he is privileged to pass along.

Arjuna, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, confronts a problem of justice. On the one hand, should he commit to make war upon the Kauravas, his cousins, he shall slaughter them – *sehr schlecht*. On the other hand, should he refuse to do battle, he shall abandon the Pandavas, his brothers, which is no great improvement, and, by some accounts, worse. Arjuna is taught by Krishna to come to justice or right conduct first through truth, or Brahman – knowledge of ultimate reality. On this Brahmanic view, truth reveals itself through meditation, and its perception supplies the foundation for just action. Here, then, justice is conceived as grounded in a form of revealed truth, which is autonomous, and antecedent to justice.

(No narrative, and certainly none of the age and mythic depth of the *Gita*, can be reduced to any one interpretive scheme. So if the present reading may allowed as plausible, it cannot be out of place to view it with reserve.)

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (2005), in his *Eastern Philosophy*, contends that Indian or Hindu philosophy is essentially or mostly metaphysical in that it is absorbed by the concern with reality, as distinct from illusion, and that, in this tradition, ethical doctrines are merely rooted in and



derived from that metaphysical (ontological) foundation. In such a case, ontology may trump the ethics, the latter being derived, perhaps exiguously, from the former. Such derivation may hint at the conclusion that Hindu political philosophy, and by extension Hindu ethics, is “relatively simple”, as Parekh (1986) has put it. If so broad a claim works, it suggests, as in the case of Arjuna, that we are again – even pervasively – to do with a construct of truth as given, as antecedent, and therefore as determining both dharma (duty) and danda (punishment).

In such ways may the substance of human order be settled. Truth may be envisioned as antecedent to order, indeed as the only condition for it. Humanly constructed arrangements may be presented as supra-human intimations. These may prove far more furtive than a plain-dealing, all-powerful creator-god who speaks from burning bushes, uses clouds as megaphones, and whispers declamations into the ears of humble prophets. Extraterrestrial and non-human truth may as easily be conveyed and imposed as via dreaming, incantation, astrology, tarot, the reading of disemboweled birds’ innards, and otherwise. Thus does the deeply ingrained notion – of a fully autonomous and independent truth – carry all (well, perhaps not all) before it.

We can see that any order always reduces to some species of ethical or legal complex, borne along by, or consisting of, rules or conventions or practices that stipulate how members of a given social matrix may or ought to interact. Any such matrix is a complex of various layers, most importantly cultural (memes), social (rules) and political (laws). In the first case, creating memes is surreptitious. In the second case, devising rules steers towards the contentious. In the third, devising laws is unfettered pugilism. It is hugely convenient, accordingly, to construe most principles as pre-existent and self-subsistent. This proclivity is the more pronounced in the degree that the principles formulated are more self-conscious and precise. Such seems to be the effect of the human mind’s idiosyncrasy and individuality. (Hobbesian solipsism?)

Rules are understandings based on shared assumptions about ontology, about what is. These assumptions readily float, levitate, and cloudily convert into dictates regarding how persons ought rightly and objectively to behave. It is understandable that this groundwork – of common assumptions regarding what is the case – may come to be presented as cosmically preexistent; already in place; having always been in place; dictates of proper behavior being mere architectural derivations from them.

That may be done as a matter of deliberate fraud. Such is the sort of case that Machiavelli and Dostoyevsky present. It is also the perspective presented by Molière (1664) in the play, *Tartuffe*, and by Sinclair Lewis (1927) in the novel, *Elmer Gantry*. All the same, it seems likely that most who are caught up in such deflective schemes actually believe them. That is to say, it seems likely that the intermediary, the prophet, is usually genuinely disposed to see self as a mere vessel, as a neutral mechanism, not the builder who constructed the ship, nor the skilled captain who commands it.

Judges enclose themselves in robes and hoods. In this they hint it is not their will, but the Constitution's, that is to be done. Kings create space around about, withdraw from the mass, build high on bluffs, overlooking the soft cheeks of rivers, so to appear more august, and to achieve distance from the hurly-burly. In such ways, truth is conveyed as standing above anyone's will or interest or whim, as coming before combinations and alliances, before compromises and back-room deals, as the ground of such transactions, not the outcome of them. In all this it is intended that truth is known; that, if it is not now known, then that it is discoverable; that we stand in it as on a certainty external to ourselves; that to stand upon it is the means by which we build up and out, cementing accord and amity; and that we are only concretely bound one to another in virtue of standing upon such firm and evident, or self-evident, foundations.

Indeed, even in most of the early literature on friendship, it tends to be agreed that friends are such as share some common outlook, some common conception of what is true, and that this ontological and epistemological commonality is a necessary condition for amity. On such a view, commitment to truth comes first; this supposedly creates a common outlook; and that in turn creates the basis of, or the possibility for, order. The implication is that friendship is the effect of a commonly agreed truth, not its cause. Truth-seeking here presents as necessarily antecedent to, and as the only ground for, friendship. But it is open to doubt whether truth-holding or truth-seeking can perform such a task.

It is understandable that many are tempted to see a prior and pristine commitment to truth as a way round the difficulty of generating good and sound association – social or political or both. But if truth is achieved via dialogic process; if even the language, within which we formulate what we take to be true, is a socio-cultural artifact; if feral children, bereft of language, are bereft too of notions of true and false and right and wrong; then truth, if not reducible to social accord, must surely be seen to require such accord as a prior condition for hopes of accessing it. If that is so, we are compelled to assume that order categorically precedes truth. We can only presume to access truth from the springboard of antecedent social accord or agreement. Rather than extract order from truth, we shall be seen, on the contrary, to extract truth from order.

We have every reason somehow to commit to truth, to place concern with it to the fore, and in this sense to underscore the value of directness, honesty, transparency, and dialogic openness. But we must not be deluded into thinking that truth itself somehow stands outside our commitment to it, or that it is external to our common will to establish it, or that it is of itself merely natural, and non-social or supra-social. Thus when we commit to truth, when we suppose that we are bound by truth, what we must see is that, what we are bound by, first and foremost, is one another, ourselves, our communities, our unities. Truth does not, nor can it, impose bonds upon us. It is we who bond ourselves to secure it, and this bond is external to, and antecedent to, such truths as we embrace. To commit to truth is first and foremost a commitment, not a truth. It is a constitutive moral act by which order is generated, community constituted, enabling pursuit of truths.

## 5. Concrete Truth-Holders

Let us imagine two actors, A & B, who entertain some notion of the categorical priority of truth over community. A & B can be said to be bound by truth in two distinct senses. The first is by way of settling upon its content (this is hard). The second is by way of a commitment to seek after it (this seems far easier). A & B, at this stage of the discussion, are truth-holders (TH). We defer consideration of truth-seekers (TS) to Section 6.

In this case, A & B, as TH, are ‘bound’ by Truth in the sense that their judgments happen to coincide regarding the truth-value of certain concrete propositions. Persons who make the same judgments about propositions, who attribute to given truth-claims the same content, often think of this as a “meeting of minds”, as also that, due to such convergence, prospective critical divergences between them may, perhaps, be sharply blunted, and that community among them be more readily achieved. It is also frequently assumed that this process is governed by automatic pilot, and that coinciding judgments directly ignite community and fellow feeling.

It is wise to season such meat cum grano salis. Suppose A & B share the well-founded belief that Willie McGee is the object of a lynching; suppose B is McGee; and that A is Lyncher-in-Chief (Heard 2010). Perversity aside, it cannot follow, despite a host of shared judgments, that A & B shall be received as fellow denizens of one and the same community of affection. A & B shall not be accounted members of the same team. For a shared view is never as such a moral or social bond. A & B are not bonded by mere similitude of outlook or understanding. Fervent enemies may be marked by strikingly similar understandings and outlooks without in the least relinquishing mutual antipathy.

Suppose then the disputants, A & B, view themselves as bound to one another, not in any direct and self-sustaining friendship, but via their common love of (commitment to) truth. This apparent bond, this intellectual coincidence, is achieved via certain concrete ontological judgments held by both. A & B are truth-holders. This is so in the sense that truth is not something they see themselves as striving for. It is something, rather, they are firmly convinced they already possess. These judgments, to which they cling, are held to independently. Yet they are distinct judgments that nonetheless chance to coincide. The subject of these judgments relates to the nature of the world, of the universe, now including, in their case, the notion of a creator-god.

This bond that A & B project, expressly or implicitly, is seen as a means – even the key – to overcoming their differences, and forming their community. What is crucial, however, is that A & B do not view the bond or community they appear to share as artificial. They do not see their common ties, their intellectual community, as in fact forged by them at all. The community they represent is seen as grounded in a reality over which they have not the least control. They see it as a natural or divine order that they can do no better than recognize, not alter, and certainly

not create. The problem is to determine whether and in how far it may be possible for shared notions about what is true to actually create bonds among actors.

Consider, now, the case of bloodied disputants, throughout the world, who may be thought capable of reconciliation via their shared belief in a single God – as between perhaps Muslims and Christians and Jews, and as indeed again within each of these faiths – broad (and largely incoherent) as each such tradition inescapably proves. Those who take this ontological notion (of an omnipotent and omniscient creator God) to be sound certainly enunciate a worthy if banal aspiration, possibly as old as the species itself. Surely a key political objective involved in promoting a common faith, whether by Moses, Alexander, Constantine, Mohammed, or Smith, is typically to generate and legitimate common rules, common behaviors, and likely common subjection ultimately to some one, unifying authority – whether the End is conceived as Imperium, Emporium, or Pax (literally, concordia).

Where the notion of a single God is in play, what is equally so is marked divergence in the articulation of God's attributes. Some think He cannot be named or known or depicted. Others proffer a name, and distinct traits, such as that He is one (as in Monophysitism) or many (as in Trinitarianism). Some contend He is the God of a distinct people, others that He is the God of all humankind. This identification of mutually inconsistent traits or qualities yields a persistent Tower of Babel, mirroring more mutual contradiction than mutual conciliation. If the word, 'God', in its monotheistic application, focuses upon singularity, that singularity is clearly brittle, and inclined to dissipate.

Here what is hypothesized is a case in which agents do not commence with a notion of common friendship, but rather with a notion of common belief, of common commitment to some supposed truth, such that accord, community, peace or order autonomously derives from that belief. The commitment to truth, in this example, takes the form of common belief in a single God. What is notable is that those seeking accord via such common belief are saliently marked, on close inspection, more by divergence than coherence. Agreement upon the idea of a single god grows soggy at that point where further traits are adduced. These split, they proliferate, and commonalty waxes into contestation. Thus, what appeared to be agreement, reduces to coincidence, and what was taken to be a bond, flounders intellectually in a sea of flux and reflux.

The construct of a single God, in short, no matter that it is shared by legions, proves inadequate to the demand for a form of truth in which all may believe and to which all may commit. It apparently does not lead into anything substantive or coherent which all can own and to which all can be said to be loyal. A common belief, whose specific and operational commonality is not or cannot be determined, supplies no obvious basis for reconciliation. Disputants may thus commit to common embrace of the idea of a single God. They may take this construct to be self-evident and self-subsistent. They may view this truth as imposed upon them with diamantine naturalness. They may accordingly reject any view of such an idea as a convention upon which they find it convenient to agree. They may thus overlook the fact that this truth, which they collectively commit to embrace, is in esse a convenience, a supposition that they may find useful to mount, so to reach a safe and enclosed valley of accord.

Taking such views of truth as a whole – here to do with the projected qualities and exigencies of the single deity – what becomes apparent, over time, is that they, in time and on inspection, proliferate and brachiate, to the point where the pretence of commonality can no longer be sustained. These initial ideas, regarding the characteristics and commands of the deity, usually are not immediately and outwardly moral ideas. These rather are ontological ideas, to do with the objective features of the universe, with how it is structured, controlled, driven. The primitive church does not see itself as determining in the first instance what ought to be, but rather what is, taking account of the true structure of the world and the nature of the divinity.

Was Jesus a man? Was he a god? Was he the only God? Was he an amalgam, of some common entity and divinity? And how could that be? While Jesus was in place, he held his disciples together. In the wake of his passing, they split apart. The immediate concern is not organizational, but ontological. In Matthew (16:13-15), Jesus reportedly says 'I and the Father are one', implying that he is God (in human form). But in John (14:28) he reportedly says, 'the father is greater than I', which, if so, must imply he and God are different, and that God he is not. On the one hand, there are the books of the Apocrypha; on the other, there are the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is finally a conference or council (Chalcedon) that settles the question. But it is a committee decision, an encompassing compromise, backed by the power of the post-Constantine state, and promoted as plain and evident truth. It is politics that held the early church together, not objective truth. The articulation of a foundational truth (dogma) is crafted (consciously or otherwise) to serve a socio-political purpose. The primary object was order. The means thereto was an appropriately immaculate ontology.

In the case of truth-holders, what we encounter are coinciding judgments as to the truth of some concrete proposition. To recognize a truth, from the perspective of one who recognizes it, is always to vouchsafe an opinion. Opinions may be, or turn out to be, false. That persons share the same opinion is not an agreement they shall so continue. Shared views do not constitute agreements at all, if we mean by 'agreement' deliberately committing to some mutual endeavor, by way of establishing a bond – contract being one type of bond. Even where there is deliberate agreement between A & B to hold some p to be true (as where an adherent vows to support the key tenets of some faith), the agreement (the bond) effectively puts agreement first, truth second. Shared views do not as such constitute common bonds. Where persons bond, by using concrete propositions (truths) as tokens of accord, it is not so much the truth that bonds them, but their antecedent desire, their will, to be bound.

Community is not so much erected on a foundation of truth, than that truth is derived from its foundation in community. It is to be presumed that what is needed for the invocation of community is not a common word, or a common ontological construct (such as Jehovah, Ahura Mazda, God, Allah, Zeus, and the like), but rather some concrete, primitive, affective sentiment, mutually entertained, that has the direct effect of rendering the abstract, ontological idea secondary – though never merely unimportant.

Promotion of a common belief in a single God can serve as a concrete stand-in for the promotion of a more abstract, and more comprehensive, Truth. Talk of God seems an obvious concession to the concern to render Truth somehow more visible and manageable. There will be concern in many traditions – not least the Islamic, when making reference to the ineffable creator-god – to retain some sense of the necessary impossibility of sensory capture of such a being. Hence taboos on attaching to this any name, assigning it gender, or daring to project upon it presumed likenesses. But these efforts, while understandable, are both half-hearted and incoherent.

If one thinks to recognize something – it may be ether, dark matter, black holes, quarks, angels, or monsters – there is always some consequential attempt to name and to describe it. That it is without name, and beyond describing, is no constraint. One is always pulled into the assignment of traits or attributes, however judicious. Even to say ‘awesome’, ‘holy’, ‘omnipotent’, or ‘omniscient’, is all of a piece. Once the descriptive journey is begun, as it must, and even should it begin with a single adjective, there is no terminus at which it may end. There ensues a proliferation of attributes, followed by the disputes attending them.

Truth, however, can be formulated more directly, and yet more abstractly, as the foundation of moral, social, and political ambition. It can be promoted as the necessarily anterior and foundational category to which is anchored the prosecution of all human affairs. This may work no better, but it is time to turn in that direction.

## **6. Abstract Truth-Seekers**

We turn here from truth-holders (TH) to truth-seekers (TS). Let us now envisage A & B as TS. They share a love of truth. But there is no concrete belief or faith or ontology on which they appear to agree. They differ regarding truth-content in some identifiable matter, and perhaps on many matters, but they undertake to overcome opposed perceptions via a common commitment to locate and to pinion reality. Let us take it that their intention is not so much to draw nigh to one another in friendship. On the contrary, their only apparent object is to establish the nature of the case (regarding some thesis, hypothesis, whatever). The truth of the matter may equate with some hypothesis as entertained by A or B or perhaps a third party: *n’importe*. What matters is that Truth is the sole or prior value to which each commits.

A & B recognize that they are ignorant of what they pursue. Neither has any way of knowing what the truth is that is ostensibly being sought; otherwise they would not now be seeking it; they would have seized it. Not knowing what it is they are pursuing, they cannot know either by what it is they are ostensibly bound. For the same reason, they cannot know who else might be after what they appear to be after; nor how these others in turn might be bound. Given that neither A nor B has any way of knowing the relevant truth, it is hard to see how this unknown truth can in any way serve to bind them.

This is not to say there can be no bond between A & B. It is only to say that the nature of such a bond cannot be what they take it to be. If A & B engage in a common endeavor, their mutual undertaking cannot be caused (motivated) by a phenomenon of which they have no conscious or unconscious knowledge. If they have concocted a bond, if they have willed into being community, the motive cannot be one to which they are entirely blind, as opposed to some concern they can see or discern. In the search for whatever, A & B commit to a process (which they know), and to one another (of whom they have some knowledge).

If A & B have an initial commitment, it is not to an unknown discovery, a truth that lies over the horizon (if anywhere), out of reach; rather, it is to a known process and to known agents. Their commitment to what they do not know cannot be their bond, even as it allows them, possibly, to learn something new. The upshot is contrary to what A & B initially expect. Truth, for truth-seekers, cannot have the consequential effect of imposing upon them a bond. Truth, for them, can only serve as a consequential benefit of an antecedent bond, one already in place. In this, it is with truth-holding as with truth-seeking. Truth does not deterministically motivate or give rise to social ties. On the contrary, it arises from social ties. That is only to say that truth can only emerge where social bonds have already been forged – to facilitate and to accommodate its emergence.

To seek after truth – given that seeking implies not having – does not guarantee access to it. If A or B is in search of any item, the implication must be that neither has that item. Persons who are seeking the truth, in the sense of searching out something of which they are ignorant (as in a Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie mystery) cannot quite, in the nature of the thing, know what they are seeking. Similarly, persons who are committed to the truth, but a truth they do not yet grasp, cannot, *sensu stretto*, know to what it is they are being committed. And not to know this, on one reading, is really not to be committed at all. (To promise must presuppose some fair grasp of what is being promised, of what is implied in the promise made.)

On a second reading, the idea of being committed to searching for something one does not know, suggests that it is not the unknown thing that is being embraced, but instead something that is known. In this context, the sense of commitment must precede the unknown x to which the commitment is directed. Take a case of marriage, where A commits to B “til death do [them] part”. It is possible and even probable that B shall turn (over time) into someone, maybe something, quite different – into some B'. At the extreme, B may go further, evolving into a complete non-B, even perhaps into a monstrous one, in the way that Dr. Jekyll becomes Mr. Hyde. Thus, this commitment by A to B is necessarily grounded in a degree of ignorance, possibly cavernous, to the point where the commitment is void or absurd.

Commitment by A to B is problematic in two respects. First, there is no intelligible commitment by A to B except on the understanding that B somehow remains roughly the same essential B that A already knows. As B's evolutionary course may lie beyond imagining, in which case all bets (or commitments) are off. So A cannot be committed to an arrangement that turns into a

completely alien deal. An earlier union with Jekyll would not obligate the spouse to an emergent Hyde.

Second, the spouse, A, might still legitimately entertain a continuing sense of obligation to B. This would derive from the sense, not that A could be legitimately committed to something quite extreme and unforeseen (that would be more like the institution of slavery), but that the commitment undertaken by A might be to an idea, an ideal, of commitment itself – of a commitment to commit. In the same way that persons may be in love with love, so may they be in love with marriage, with surrender, with abandonment of self and of ego. So commitment to truth is no basis for a bond. But commitment is itself a type of bond, and if open-ended, as in certain types of renunciation, including some forms of marriage, it has to be seen as somehow antecedent to any object upon which it may focus.

## **7. Coda**

To hold a common commitment to truth – in view of ignorance of its content – cannot clarify the express object of such commitment. It is not possible intelligibly to be 'loyal' to the truth, taken as some irrefragable procedure or indisputable outcome, in as far as that procedure or outcome cannot be known. Given such inaccessibility, any supposedly common love of the truth (understood as an aspiration) can never serve as a foundation for human cultural, social, or political bonding.

Familial, social, political, and other human bonds are not established on the basis of truth-holding or truth-seeking. Such bonds are basically owed to and grounded in the primitive will and instinct to establish them. The impulse to bond as such may be natural, but no concrete type of bond can be so viewed. Bonds are always in some sense particular, and each particular is ultimately concocted, ultimately artificial, and thus plastic. Science has often much that is useful to say about social bonding. The relevant point, however, is that bonding is antecedent to science, and without it science would not exist. Religion is often important to community, and it constitutes a significant and continuing expression of community. But community is antecedent to religion, and religion would not exist without it.

If community is not imposed by truth, if humans cannot be 'loyal' to the truth, they can forge communities whose members are loyal to one another. They can privilege one another; they can commit to their common welfare; and it is plain they can prioritize persons over ideas or puzzles or theorems or hypotheses (including the God hypothesis). To do that is also to detach persons from the ideas they may have entertained, even from the practices by which they may be stained. In some such way, it may out that amity provides the soundest foundation for objectivity in the pursuit of truth, and for voiding autonomic contrariness along the way.

The concrete friend is of greater value than the abstract idea. Ideas surface as evanescent and impermanent aspects of the friend's persona. It is not that the idea is expendable, for it remains



properly subject to affirmation or rejection. But its validity is likely to be easier to assess, on its own terms, where that process can be abstracted from the color of personality and provenance. A friend cannot be one who merely flatters, since there is no value in that, nor valid friendship either. Many modern parents, in regard to relations with their own children, are often no better than flatterers. Eager for friendship, they spurn it in the public realm, where most needed, but in the domestic arena, lavish it, like gold on quicksand, a very model of disordered indulgence.

Validity is more readily assessed by reference to the objective weight of evidence for or against, if irrelevance is kept at bay. Friends, or persons disposed to be friendly, may be better able – regarding the idea, hypothesis, or proposition – to ‘let the chips fall where they may’. That should be possible where friendship is prioritized over idea (dogma, script, hypothesis, etc.). That is a matter of confining the idea to its proper place, a place as immune to blind preferment as to petty antipathy.

Civic interlocutors who inject friendship into their relations – rather than intruding indifference, neutrality, or hostility – are better positioned to point their discussions in the direction of purposive conversation than vituperative argumentation. In this context, friendship is perceived as constant; the ideas contested qualify as secondary. The baseline of friendship does not oppose counter-argument, but warmly welcomes it. It does not deflect from truth, but nimbly facilitates it. It does not weaken important research, but effectively strengthens it. The underlying friendship norm does not extirpate ego – which is neither possible nor desirable – but does constrain it, tethering its play. Interactive research that is not plagued by personal animosity, and triumphalism, and the imperative to worst the Adversarial Other ('by any means necessary') ought, on a balance of probability, to facilitate sounder results and a saner society.

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