



The Art of Peace

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John F. Kennedy once insightfully observed, "I realize that the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war. But we have no more urgent task."

Reflect on the events that took place 70 years ago in the Central American country of Costa Rica. A group of leaders in Costa Rica had just lost the national election in early 1948, and decided to seize power in a legislative coup. This led to a Costa Rican Civil War that lasted for 44 days, and killed about 2,000 people.

The Costa Rican coffee rancher, politician, agitator and rebel commander Jose Figueres then came to power. He was a "militant socialist" who had visionary views. Despite living in a dangerous region among many countries in Latin America that were ruled by authoritarian dictators, Figueres abolished the country's army. As a result of this courageous decision to disband the army and rely instead on a national police force and international allies committed to rules of law, his nation has been able to save a lot of money otherwise to be spent on the military, and propitiously has used it to fund good public education and excellent healthcare and other social goods and valuable priorities.

Seen from the perspective of hindsight over the past 70 years, one of the greatest aspects of the admirable legacy left by Jose Figueres is his steadfast dedication to democracy and the greater good. Costa Rica today stands apart from the other nations of Central America for its prosperity, safety and peacefulness, and Figueres is arguably more responsible for this than any other single political figure. In particular, Figueres is fondly remembered by many Costa Ricans as the architect of a general prosperity for many years.

Wars are much worse than peace, which can best be achieved through collaborative dispute resolution. Wars generally cause more destruction and economic and social costs than producing socially desirable advantages. Make no mistake about it: wars are like revolutions, unnecessarily harmful to the common good.

How best to defend a democracy? Costa Rica decided to get rid of its army. The concentration of power in the military is a threat to peace and security, especially in small countries, where military forces all-too-often introduce a heightened risk of a democratically elected civilian government being overthrown in a military coup.

To repeat a relevant riff contained in *A Feminine Vision*: "We should strive to resolve conflicts peaceably by talking to each other in respectful dialogue, and through non-violent conflict resolution, diplomacy, negotiation, and seeking win-win solutions and fair compromises. We should respect rules of law, especially international laws that represent the common good for the whole." ... "Remember a lesson taught to us by Costa Rica's experiment in demilitarization: a high degree of social cohesion is fostered by peace and generous investments in education and health. This is one reason why Costa Rica is Number One on the Happy Planet Index, and it is also revealingly much higher on the Global Peace Index than the USA (we are pathetically 128th out of 163 countries evaluated).

It is good to be governed by fair-mindedness in our economic and political systems, and by rules of law enacted by reasonable authorities, and by a respected Constitution and Bill of Rights.

As the respectable Norman Cousins observed, "People who develop the habit of thinking of themselves as world citizens are fulfilling the first requirement of sanity in our time."

Demilitarization in all the countries of Central America would have made the region vastly better off than it is today, and there would not have been such a desperate need for immigrants to seek better lives in Costa Rica.

Support for dictators is treachery against the people of the country being ruthlessly ruled, so it is a strategy based on depriving people of their liberties, not standing up for them. The United States should return to its pre-Trump ideals and stand up for human rights and the rights of working people and women.

Note that, although it is true that Jose Figueres started a Civil War, he did so at least in part to redress crooked elections. Conflict was precipitated by the vote of the Costa Rican Legislature, dominated by pro-government representatives, to annul the results of the presidential elections held in February 1948. The incumbent party, loathe to give up power and its perks, alleged that the triumph of opposition candidate Otilio Ulate Blanco had been achieved by fraud. Figueres led a rebel army against the power abusers, and quickly defeated them and their allies in the Costa Rican communist party.

Figueres was a true believer in the power of the electoral process, and once he was in power, he refused to act like some of his predecessors by committing election fraud to stay there. He even invited United Nations observers to help with the 1958 election in which his candidate lost to the opposition. His words following the election speak volumes about his philosophy: "I consider our defeat as a contribution, in a way, to democracy in Latin America. It is not customary for a party in power to lose an election."

When not serving as President, Figueres remained active in politics. He had great international prestige and was invited to speak in the USA in 1958 after US Vice-President Richard Nixon had been spat upon during a visit to Latin America. Figueres famously explained the incident, saying a thing often quoted since then: "the people cannot spit at a foreign policy."

Figueres served as President of Costa Rica on three occasions between 1948 and 1974, and after he was re-elected for his third term, he continued to champion democracy and make friends internationally — for instance, although he maintained good relations with the USA, he also found a way to sell Costa Rican coffee in the USSR. He is considered one of the most important architects of modern Costa Rica.

Demagogues and Rogues

Pushers of arms sales are often responsible for destabilizing countries and entire regions by facilitating the rise to power of strong men and autocrats who impose harsh rule on their people.

When leaders activate people's fears and frighten them about immigrants or drugs or socialism, or whatever, the people reveal a desire to want to be safe from the threat, and are willing to give up some freedoms to feel safer.

But this usually doesn't increase their real safety and security -- and it does tend to make people less free.

Molly Ivins: "The impulse to make ourselves safer by making ourselves less free is an old one ... When we are badly frightened, we think we can make ourselves safer by sacrificing some of our liberties. We did it during the McCarthy era out of fear of communism. Less liberty is regularly proposed as a solution to crime, to pornography, to illegal immigration, to abortion, to all kinds of threats."

Some say we need to cultivate greater compassion for the human condition, and the experience of others in it. Why not?

Evocative lyrics of the 1966 song *For What It's Worth* by Buffalo Springfield,

There's battle lines being drawn

Nobody's right if everybody's wrong

Young people speaking their minds

Are getting so much resistance from behind

It's time we stop^[SEP]

Hey, what's that sound?^[SEP] Everybody look - what's going down ...

What a field day for the heat^[SEP] A thousand people in the street^[SEP]

Singing songs and carrying signs^[SEP]

Mostly saying, "hooray for our side"

It's time we stop^[SEP]

Hey, what's that sound? Everybody look - what's going down ...
 Paranoia strikes deep Into your life it will creep
 It starts when you're always afraid
 Step out the line, the men come and take you away ...

Dateline October 22, 2019

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia on October 11, 2019 "for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighboring Eritrea." Yay! for peaceful coexistence, and for cooperative attempts to resolve conflicts!

Ironically, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed made a war-like comment soon after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He said his country could get millions of soldiers ready if there is a need to go to war with Egypt, due to threats by Egypt over a dam being built in Ethiopia on the Nile River. He sensibly added that only negotiation can resolve a current deadlock.

The dam on the Nile is already 70% complete, and such conflicts over water supply issues are definitely going to be contentious issues around the globe in coming years. In fact, a number of agencies of the United Nations reported in a 2015 World Water Development Report titled *Water for a Sustainable World* that there will be a shortfall of 40% in fresh water supplies worldwide by the year 2030. By then, the number of people without access to adequate supplies of fresh water is projected to increase from 750 million people right now to over 3 billion people. Woe! The report also indicated that there will be an increase of more than 50% in global water demand by 2050, and groundwater depletion is increasing the risks of widespread drinking water shortages and catastrophic crop failures, as well as an intensification of conflicts over access to fresh water and its usages.

Words of war, it should be noted, have all-too-often throughout history become acts of war, so I'm thinking that clearly articulated words of peace might contribute to our societies becoming more peaceful. Let's give peace a chance, like John Lennon lyrically encouraged us to do, and take committed steps to promote peace more wholeheartedly!

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

--- Anne Frank

Think about a few of the most famous books about war and peace. *The Art of War* is an ancient Chinese military treatise attributed to Sun Tzu, a high-ranking military general and strategist. The text of *The Art of War* is composed of 13 chapters, each of which is devoted to one aspect of warfare. The treatise, published more than 2,250 years ago, is commonly considered one of the definitive works on military strategy and tactics. Thousands of books about war have been written since *The Art of War* was published, and much could no doubt be learned by a close study of a sample of some of the best of them.

In 1532, the famous book *The Prince* appeared in print. Written by Niccolo Machiavelli, this was one of the first works of modern political philosophy. Its general theme was that the aims of "princes" (rulers) include things like glory and political survival, so it is easy to see how they justify the use of immoral means to achieve those overarching ends -- no matter how self-serving and hubris-engorged they may be.

One of Sun Tzu's most famous quotes in *The Art of War* is "All warfare is based on deception." While there are many compelling instances in which this is true in military strategy, it is also generally true that leadership by deception isn't leadership. "It's fraud."

Consider the involvement of the United States in the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in U.S. history. Launched by an invasion in October 2001, less than one month after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. by a largely Saudi Arabian group of terrorists, the terrible toll in dollars spent is tragically exacerbated by the death of more than 2,300 U.S. troops and injuries to more than 20,500 over the last 18 years. And more than 100,000 Afghans, including civilians, soldiers and militants, have been killed in this internecine conflict.

Now it is coming to light that U.S. officials have repeatedly and knowingly lied to the American people. Our leaders

have frequently told Big Lies about how the war was going, and whether the war could be won, making many positive pronouncements about the winnability of the war that they knew to be wrong. This information has been revealed by interviews conducted by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction between 2014 and 2018 for a "Lessons Learned" project. When we fail to learn lessons, we are much more likely to be deplorably doomed to repeat them.

These interviews reveal that "a toxic mix of U.S. government policies, under the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, directly contributed to Afghanistan's descent into one of the world's most corrupt countries." ... "U.S. leaders have claimed publicly that they had no tolerance for corruption in Afghanistan, but that was one of several topics related to the war effort on which they intentionally and systematically misled the public", according to a trove of confidential government interviews obtained by The Washington Post.

"American representatives often looked the other way at egregious and brazen graft, so long as the offenders were considered allies. Congress appropriated vast sums of money, which were handed out with little oversight or record keeping. The ensuing greed and corruption undermined the legitimacy of the nascent Afghani government, and helped make the ground more fertile for the Taliban's resurgence."

"The basic assumption was that corruption is an Afghan problem and we are the solution. But there is one indispensable ingredient for corruption — money — and we were the ones who had the money," said Barnett Rubin, a former senior State Department adviser and a New York University professor.

The adage is as true in Afghanistan as America: Follow the money. Gert Berthold, a forensic accountant who served on a military task force in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012, analyzed 3,000 Defense Department contracts worth \$106 billion. He said they calculated that about 40 percent of the money ended up in the pockets of insurgents, criminal syndicates or corrupt Afghan officials. Berthold said few U.S. officials wanted to hear about the evidence they uncovered: 'No one wanted accountability,' he said. 'If you're going to do anti-corruption, someone has got to own it. From what I've seen, no one is willing to own it.'

Christopher Kolenda, a retired Army colonel who deployed to Afghanistan several times and advised three U.S. generals in charge of the war, said the Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai had "self-organized into a kleptocracy" by 2006. "I like to use a cancer analogy," the colonel told his government interviewers. "Petty corruption is like skin cancer; there are ways to deal with it and you'll probably be just fine. Corruption within the ministries, higher level, is like colon cancer; it's worse, but if you catch it in time, you're probably ok. Kleptocracy, however, is like brain cancer; it's fatal."

The interviews are being revealed so that the American people can see for themselves what's been going on. It has been gathered pursuant to an investigation by the Washington Post, which has fought an on-going legal battle for three years for this information under the Freedom of Information Act. More than 400 people who played a direct role in the war in Afghanistan, from generals to diplomats to aid workers, were questioned about what has gone wrong. A report in 2016 had outlined the conclusions of the interviews in broad brushstrokes, but a lot of the most noteworthy material was held back.

In 1869, the novel *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy was published, and it is regarded as one of the most important works in world literature. Wikipedia notes that Tolstoy himself, "somewhat enigmatically, said of *War and Peace* that it was 'not a novel, even less is it a poem, and still less a historical chronicle'. Large sections of the work, especially in the later chapters, are philosophical discussions rather than narrative." Wikipedia further informs: "*War and Peace* delineates in graphic detail the events surrounding a French invasion of Russia, and the impact of the Napoleonic era on Tsarist society, as seen through the eyes of five Russian aristocratic families."

I haven't read these books. *War and Peace* alone is one of the longest novels every written. Wondering about the themes explored and the insights conveyed in *War and Peace*, I referred to *SparkNotes*, to see what the arcane hoopla is all about. *SparkNotes* laudably provides valuable *General Information* about many books, along with good summaries of their *Context*, *Plot Overview*, *Character List*, *Analysis of Major Characters*, and *main Themes, Motif & Symbols*. A lifetime could be spent exploring important books in world literature, and curiosity and interest could be stimulated with a modicum of greater familiarity.

Tolstoy was born into a well-known family of old Russian nobility. *SparkNotes* elaborates concerning Tolstoy: "His contact with his own peasants led to a heightened appreciation of their morality, camaraderie and enjoyment of life, as evidenced in his celebration of Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*. Indeed, Tolstoy became quite critical of the superficiality of upper class Russians, as we can sense in his portraits of the Kuragin family in *War and Peace*. Ultimately, Tolstoy developed a desire to seek a kind of spiritual regeneration by renouncing his family's possessions, much to the dismay of his long-suffering wife." One can just imagine!

Leo Tolstoy grew from being a somewhat "dissolute and privileged society author to the non-violent and spiritual anarchist of his latter days". The salient influences of his experiences in the army, and of travels to Europe, surely swayed his understanding. He was disillusioned with abuses of power by the Russian government, and he finally reached a point where he declared: "The truth is that the State is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but above all to corrupt its citizens ... Henceforth, I shall never serve any government anywhere."

Tolstoy was struck by descriptions of ascetic renunciation as being a path to holiness in Christianity and Buddhism and Hinduism. After reading passages such as the following, which abound in the ethical works of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, the Russian nobleman chose poverty and formal denial of the will: "But this very necessity of involuntary suffering (by poor people) for eternal salvation is also expressed by that utterance of the Savior (Matthew 19:24): 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' Therefore those who were greatly in earnest about their eternal salvation, chose voluntary poverty when fate had denied this to them and they had been born into wealth. Thus Buddha was born a prince, but voluntarily took to the mendicant's staff; and Francis of Assisi, the founder of the mendicant orders who, as a youngster at a ball where the daughters of all the notabilities were sitting together, was asked: 'Now Francis, will you not soon make your choice from these beauties?' and who replied: 'I have made a far more beautiful choice!' Yes? 'Whom?' Well, 'La povertà (poverty)': whereupon he abandoned every thing shortly afterwards and wandered through the land as a mendicant."

These words are scarcely comprehensible to us in our busy, variety loving, mindlessly materialistic and pleasure-seeking 21st century America! Tolstoy, interestingly, was a contemporary of Mark Twain's; he was born seven years before him, and he died in 1910, the same year as Mark Twain. Though the two writers never met, they both share a common legacy of having had a "gargantuan influence" on world literature.

An Interlude of Machiavellian Introspection

Niccolo Machiavelli was born in 1469 in Florence, Italy. He passed his childhood peacefully, receiving a humanistic education that was customary for young men of the Renaissance middle class. He also spent two years studying business mathematics, then worked for the next seven years in Rome for a Florentine banker. After returning to Florence in 1494, he witnessed the expulsion of the Medici family, the wealthy and highly influential "oligarchic despots" who had ruled Florence for many decades, and the rise of Girolamo Savanorola, a Dominican religious zealot who took control of the region shortly thereafter.

Italy at that time became the scene of intense political strife. The city-states of Florence, Milan, Venice and Naples fought for control of Italy, and so did the Vatican and France and Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Each of these powers attempted to pursue a strategy of playing the other powers off against one other, and they also engaged in dishonorable practices like blackmail and violence. The same year that Machiavelli returned to Florence, Charles VIII of France invaded Italy. This was the first of several French invasions that would occur during Machiavelli's lifetime. These events influenced Machiavelli's attitudes toward government, and they formed the backdrop for his later impassioned pleas for Italian unity.

Machiavelli wanted to gain political power, so one of his goals in writing *The Prince* was to win the favor of Lorenzo de Medici, who was governor of Florence at the time and the person to whom he dedicated the book. Machiavelli is said to have hoped to land an advisory position within the Florentine government.

The most revolutionary aspect of *The Prince* is its divorce of politics and ethics. Classical political theory had traditionally linked political law with a higher moral law. In contrast, Machiavelli argued that political action must always be considered in light of its practical consequences, rather than some lofty ideal. It is a practical and

amoral guide for a ruler, rather than an abstract treatise of principled philosophy.

Machiavelli's book also distinguishes itself on the subject of free will. Medieval and Renaissance thinkers often looked to religion or ancient authors for explanations of plagues, famines, invasions and other calamities; they considered the prevention of such disasters to be beyond the scope of human power. Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* that people have the ability to shield themselves against misfortune, and he expresses an extraordinary confidence in the power of human self-determination. He also affirms his belief in free will as opposed to a predetermined divine destiny.

SparkNotes notes that people admire generosity, courage, honor and piety in others, but generally do not emulate these virtues themselves. "Ambition lies among those who have achieved some power, but most common people are satisfied with the way things are, and therefore do not yearn to improve on the status quo." Improve on it?! Or, as with the unethically over-ambitious, to subordinate the common good to their selfish advantages.

Knowing human nature, we see that people generally remain adequately content and happy so long as they do not suffer too much injustice or hardship or oppression. Given this fact, ruling elites are wise not to let hardships become too extreme, or oppression too blatant, if they want to protect their hopes and expectations for indefinitely perpetuating their privileged status.

Machiavelli's ideas have been oversimplified and vilified since they were first published. His political thought is usually unfairly defined in terms of *The Prince*. The adjective "Machiavellian" is used to mean "manipulative," "deceptive," or "ruthless." But Machiavelli's *Discourses*, a work considerably longer and more developed than *The Prince*, propounds republican themes of civic virtue, patriotism and open political participation.

Machiavelli also wrote a book titled *The Art of War*. It consists of a preface and seven chapters that take the form of a series of dialogues taking place in gardens built in the 1490s for Florentine aristocrats and humanists as a place to engage in philosophic and political discussions. Let's imagine ourselves visiting these gardens, together, for similar purposes. Let's talk.

Machiavelli developed the philosophy of "limited warfare", asserting that when diplomacy fails, war is an extension of politics. *The Art of War* also emphasized the need to have a state militia, and promoted the concept of a valid need for an armed citizenry. He believed that all society, religion, science and art rested on security provided by the military. In *The Prince*, he declared that "a prince should have no other object, no any other thought, nor take anything as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline; for that is the only art which is of concern to one who commands." Civilization has come a long ways since those days; or has it?

Reflections on War - and Peace

My own thinking about war and peace are exhaustively expressed in *Reflections on War - and Peace*. The ideas in all these Earth Manifesto books and essays point the way for expanded reflections on the Art of Peace. This new art should be developed and honed and honored and pursued with much greater conviction and commitment than ever before. Generous incentives and effective disincentives should be established to make peace much more profitable, and to make war a significantly less desirable boon to anyone, especially including those who profit outlandishly from wars.

Albert Einstein was a scientist who did not feel detached from social responsibility, and he became one of the world's leading spokesmen for pacifism and non-violent conflict resolution. He is honored for his ceaseless struggle to achieve peace through world order and international cooperation. These are the hallmarks of a great man, and they are great ideas! One of his greatest quotes: "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

Personal Reflections

The great American journalist and TV anchor Charles Kuralt once said, "The everyday kindness of the back roads more than makes up for the agony of the headlines." Today's headlines, filled with scandal and public corruption and merited impeachment proceedings make one mutter, "May we live in interesting times, indeed!"

A tsunami of distractions is being broadcast on Fox News and Twitter to hide or cover up an iceberg's depth of worse things, like corrupt dealings to allow fossil fuel companies to maximize their profits by imposing costs on the public, and the sacrifice of healthy ecosystems and clean water and clean air and a stable climate, and amped up assaults on the biological diversity of life on Earth.

After I graduated from college and worked for a year, I spent 15 months vagabonding around Europe and the Near East and North Africa, enjoying many memorable experiences and meeting some generous and kind-hearted people -- all on the cheap, on a budget of about \$3,000. When I returned home, I encountered more culture shock in America than I had experienced in any foreign culture, and I set about trying to figure out what to do with my life. I ended up working at several temporary jobs, one of which gave me an office for a year where I struggled to help straighten out a colossal corporate accounting mess. I still have a faded wall hanging that I made and put up in that office. In my boldest dark blue calligraphy, the words of Tom Robbins from *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* are etched in my memory:

"Plans are one thing and fate another. When they coincide, success results. Yet success mustn't be considered the absolute. It is questionable, for that matter, whether success is an adequate response to life. Success can eliminate as many options as failure."

A Telling Tale

"Life is like a bicycle; in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving."

--- Albert Einstein

I have an old friend named Sam who once joined me on a vividly memorable excursion to the Eel River in Northern California more than forty years ago. One day along this beautiful stream, in the vicinity of some towering and hauntingly beautiful groves of the tallest living trees (*Sequoia sempervirens*, i.e. coastal redwoods), we were enjoying a lovely afternoon along the river, as high as kites, and we began skipping stones on the river. I would find a nice smooth round flat rock and let it fly, generally hoping to have it skip a dozen times before sinking into the water or striking the opposite banks of the small river, across the riffled pool where we found ourselves. Sam had a different approach; he would hunt around gathering up a whole stash of the best-looking river-smoothed stones, saving them up until he had a dozen, and then he would announce the launch of a fusillade, and he would skip one after another.

The success of any given toss is strongly correlated to the quality of a stone's shape, as well as the skill of the throw, yet there were always times when a perfect stone thrown just right would catch a riffle in the river and plummet straight to the bottom. My friend had enlisted in the military for a brief spell back in the 1970s before the harshness of the discipline compelled him to leave a Texas Boot Camp for a decades-long stint in the Coast Guard Reserves. So when he declared, "That rock had an attitude problem!", I suspected that the observation had a deeper subtext of chagrin-engendering antecedents.

All these years later, in a quite curious contrapuntal echo across more than four decades, I am the one today who has saved up these written salvos rather than being the type who tweets them spontaneously on Twitter all the time, and they are on the cusp of a launch of themes so broad in scope and so cacophonously potentially harmonious that I have no clue how the resulting splash will really play out. Like Ishmael undertaking a journey that eventually led him to a Great White Whale, I proceed.

"God willing", and with the passive collaboration of the first million readers, this broad fusillade could continue skipping across the surface of human consciousness indefinitely into the future, and "make all the difference", like a road taken by the poet Robert Frost. Visualize the poet, and imagine his conundrum when presented with choices of many possibilities that diverge before us in the undergrowth of our lives. Who's to say?

Ishmael is the narrator and one of the main characters in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. The name Ishmael sets the stage for a Biblical allegory, because in *Genesis*, the biblical Abraham's first son Ishmael was banished to wander in the desert wilderness, while in *Moby Dick*, Melville's Ishmael wanders upon the desolate sea. Both Ishmaels experience a miraculous rescue, the first from thirst, and the other as the only crewmember to survive

after the great white whale rammed the whaling vessel *Pequod*, causing an epic whirling vortex to drag the rest of the whaling boats and crew down with it.

Ishmael famously postulated that mankind lives out a "story", which each person knows by the time they are "six or seven," a story that covers all areas of life including race, politics and nationality. The story is so ingrained in culture that it operates like background noise and nobody actually hears it, even though it plays continuously. Ishmael tried to learn to discern this voice of "Mother Culture", and he would hum the story to himself deep in the recesses of his mind, always remaining conscious of it, and was thereby alienated from the people around him to a certain degree. Ishmael established a vocabulary that had to be used in order to avoid abstraction, so he suggested that the world's "civilized" people be called the "Takers," and the "primitive" people be called the "Leavers". No matter where they live, Takers are united by their desire for civilization, and their embrace of it, while Leavers are united in their eschewal of civilization, as if wanting to absquatulate.

Ishmael defines a "story" as a scenario that connects and explains the relationship between mankind and the world and the gods. People "enact" a story by living so as to make it a reality. "Culture" involves a people enacting a particular story. Ishmael introduces this idea of a living mythology in which a civilization enacts the story it believes. Ishmael asserts that Takers regard the Earth as a life support system, and since they consider themselves to be the central entity in the Universe, they expect it to be subservient to them. The creation myth of Mother Culture assumes that the gods created planet Earth solely to engender and support mankind. Ishmael suggests the dangerous extension of this premise: man is entitled to treat the Earth however he wants. This story essentially allows human beings to blame everything on the gods, since it was they who gave man dominance, and if the Earth is being destroyed, that must be what the gods intended.

A curious aspect of the overarching mythologies by which human beings tend to see themselves is that, despite having existed for a relatively short amount of time, humans assume we are the very pinnacle of life. In doing so, we ignore the certainty that a million years from now, evolutionary change will have altered that perspective just as it has radically changed the perspective of a dinosaur 75 million years ago that might have regarded itself, if consciously aware, as being the pinnacle of creation at that stage in the evolution of life on Earth.

It may seem like I have lost track of Sam in the seemingly haphazard drift of this digression, but I remember him well, and fondly, for he died young, and

I miss him yet. Sam and I, along with our best college buddy Terry, had all climbed beautiful Mt. Shasta one spring weekend (14,179 feet, as Terry would characteristically declare, selecting from an extensive array of mountain elevation statistics and a plethora of other geologic details that he loved to commit to memory in his brain). This majestic peak in the southern Cascades was clothed in deep snow that day in late May, and I still have an old photo of the three of us atop the peak, Sam with his ice ax held aloft in triumph at our success in the strenuous endeavor of getting to the summit of that towering snow-covered volcanic mountain peak.

"Here and there, now and then, lose yourself in nature and find peace."

--- John Muir

Truly,

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