

How Shall We Then Live?

F. Earle Fox

1. Introduction: Setting Up the Issues

The assigned topic, “How Should Humanity Steer the Future?” asks key spiritual questions: What is life all about? And the rise of science seems to have given us a power to steer things for the better.

The issues go much deeper than science itself, to the metaphysical level, revolving around two basic worldviews: *first*, the open circle cosmos, with communication between those within the circle of contingent existence and God outside; and *second*, the closed-circle cosmos, with no creator outside of itself with whom to communicate – a perfectly closed system.

The Biblical worldview is the open circle, and the secular and pagan worldviews are closed circles.

The goal of such “steering” is assumed here to mean producing a society” in which good predominates over bad. In this essay, the word 'good' will mean, '*that which promotes and enhances life and relationship*'. 'Bad' will mean '*that which hurts or demeans life or relationship*'.

“Good vs. bad” here is not a *moral* distinction, but merely pragmatic yet empirically verifiable. E.g., some things, such as war and famine inhibit life and relationship, others such as good food, good parenting, friendship, etc., increase life and relationship. Most persons want “goods”, but that does not by itself make them *morally obligatory*. One is just lucky to get them. (We will discuss the obligatory shortly, the “right” contrasted with the “good”.)¹

Two stabilities measure heavily in this discussion: 1. the personal, ontological, stability of *being*; and 2. the moral stability of *doing*, behavior.

2. Coercive Power vs. Moral Order

Scanning history, one hears a steady background drum beat, that the powerful have a right, even a duty, to rule the weak, because no one else can effectively rule. Even a tyranny is better than the chaos of no government, and the only alternative to chaos was the strong man. So, the primary steering instrument through most of history has been government. But always waiting in the wings, and sometimes center stage, was religion, and more recently, education. The dynamic between civil and religious government tells much of the story of Western history, with the near resolution of that strife being a crown jewel of Western Civ.

The ancients understood the evils of tyrants, but had little else to offer because, no pagan morality could successfully call tyrants to account. Everywhere the strong man ruled by default, making decisions on the field of battle. The strong man was, *de facto*, above the moral order, such as they had. He had little heart for the poor, but rather for maintaining his position at the top of the power pyramid against an incessant stream of competitors climbing up the steps.

Athens had a go at “democracy”, but freedom was for only one quarter of the population.

1. See Fox, Earle, *Law & Grace in Imago Dei*, especially Part I, at <http://www.theroadtoemmaus.org/EM/ShpMI/Law&Grace/00Law&Grace.htm> 4/9/14

Half the population were slaves, and women were to stay at home. Moreover, politics was chaotic because the vote at any given meeting of the voters depended on who happened to be in the forum. Each meeting had total freedom to enact or retract anything, so the next meeting could overturn whatever was done in previous meetings. There was no tail on this kite to keep it steady in the winds. For this and other reasons, the high Hellenic culture lasted only about a century (roughly the 400's BC) before disintegrating into the lowlands of the Hellenistic era.²

The pagan world never rose far above its inability, from lack of an objective moral order, to rein in the power-lust of tyrants. Power consistently trumped their make-shift morality. Wars are started almost never by the people of the land, but rather by top leaders often with huge egos. Both pagan and secular politics are trapped in this cycle of violence. Attempts are made to put the military under civil command, as in the United States, and to never permit the military to take over police action. But as governments gets more centralized, that distinction between the military and police disappears.³ That disappearance in secular nations all over the globe led to horrendous results.⁴

3. Biblical Government

The American founding fathers studied Greece and Rome. But they quoted the Bible more than any other source in the search for a new government of, by, and for the people.⁵

Biblical religion was dubbed “ethical monotheism” because of its uniquely objective moral order based on the will of the creator-*ex-nihilo*, who, being the creator of all things, could define the reason for the existence of all things. That reason-for-existence was the foundation of Biblical morality, a world-changing event, challenging and influencing the moral theory of all cultures with which it came into contact.⁶

Biblical morality began in earnest at Mt. Sinai with the Decalogue. Refinements followed such as the command to love one's neighbor just as we love ourselves.⁷ Then Jesus further refines, that love is the foundation of *all* commandments. The two highest commandments in the universe are to love God and one's neighbor.⁸ All lower commandments are examples of what the two highest commandments look like applied in practical affairs.

Two things thus resulted. *First*, the law of God was universal, ruling over kings and potentates equally with the poor and weak; and *second*, all law was based on love, not on force. The strong and the weak are now under the same universal law of God. No exceptions. Rulers among the Hebrews were admonished to judge impartially, whether rich or poor, strong or weak. No exceptions. The moral law, by promoting a moral consensus among the people, thereby

2. Murray, Gilbert, *The Five Stages of Greek Religion*, tells the story.

3. Civilian law presumes innocence until proved guilty and requires due process for conviction. Deadly force is used only as a last resort. The military operates by the rules of the battlefield, using deadly and overwhelming force against an opponent presumed to be guilty and intent on causing harm. The *posse committatus* law in America forbids the use of American military forces against American citizens.

4. Visit www.hawaii.edu for the work of R. J. Rummel who has documented the world death tolls over recent centuries. The biggest killers are not in war, but in “peace” when governments attack their own people. 4/9/14

5. Barton, David, *Original Intent*, www.wallbuilders.com 4/9/14

6. Fox, Earle, *Law & Grace in Imago Dei*, esp. Part I, “Defining 'Oughtness' and 'Love'” Go to <http://theroadtoemmaus.org/EM/ShpMI/Law&Grace/00Law&Grace.htm> 4/9/14

7. Leviticus 19:17-18

8. Matthew 22:34-40

began to shift the balance of power from rulers to the people.

Force was to be used, but only in the service of love, protecting the rightful freedoms and obligations to pursue the goods of life. Rich and poor, strong and weak are commanded to treat each other with the same love, making life and relationship flourish.

When Jesus in Matthew 22 makes love of neighbor the second highest commandment in the universe, for the first time in history, doing good for one another is authoritatively declared to be a universal obligation. Loving one's neighbor was not only *good* (promoting life and relationship), but it was now *obligatory* (commanded). It takes the command of God to make the good obligatory.⁹

The secular and pagan worlds cannot get out of the power syndrome because neither can establish either of the two fundamental stabilities – ontological or moral. An emotionally and spiritually healthy person must have (1) a sense of *personal security, a stability of one's being*, and (2) a sense of *moral direction*, how to conduct his intentions, doing, behavior. In the Biblical world, God supplies both.

In a population of persons condemned to eternal random chance insecurity (the closed-circle cosmos), the chances of steering the future toward a secure and stable society are thus on the south side of slim to nothing. The world, independently of God, cannot raise up strong and secure individuals, and thus is compulsively condemned to a search for stability via the eternal recycling of chaos – at which the world has labored for most of its history. “*We'll find it. It's in here somewhere....*”

Problems with steering the future are thus first cosmological: what kind of cosmos do we inhabit, open or closed, and what kinds of possibilities are available? Second, the problems are moral and political: what kind of persons do we want to be in personal and public life?

4. How is “Science” Involved?

Yet we must ask, What have the natural sciences and the philosophy of science to do with this? Or the enormous advances in information made accessible by computers?

For natural science to succeed, nature must be predictable over time and space, which means nature must obey certain laws. Those laws make the *being* of nature stable and predictable, but tell us nothing about the *morality* of nature. Natural law is about things with no free will, moral law is for beings *with* free will who are thus held responsible. Natural law is empirically discovered, moral law is revealed.

Honest science leads to correct information about something. It is morally neutral in that respect. But that information can be badly and wrongly used, especially by those with political (i.e., coercive) power.

These kinds of conclusions led the American founding fathers to limit the scope of political power, binding government, as they said, with the chains of the Constitution. Thus they *divided* power and authority (into separate legislative, executive, and judicial branches), and *dispersed* power and authority (among federal, state, county, and city). The founders understood that we must both follow God (the moral order) and limit civil government.

The advances of science will no doubt effect the lives of those who put those advances to

9. Fox, Earle, *Law & Grace in Imago Dei*, esp. Part I, “Defining 'Oughtness' and 'Love'”
<http://theroadtoemmaus.org/EM/ShpMI/Law&Grace/00Law&Grace.htm>. 4/9/14

work. Whether that will measurably ground the two stabilities, or raise the intellectual, moral, or spiritual goods of humanity, is a harder question to answer.

So, again, the problem of steering humanity is essentially political, moral, and spiritual. The effects of science and technology depend mostly on the kinds of people steering them.

5. Ways of Steering: Civil Government, Science, & Religion

In any case, America all but lost has lost the desire to limit government, believing it to be inherently innocuous, especially when it feeds, houses, clothes, and educates us.

Given the history of recent centuries, that is an absurd belief.¹⁰ The steering of our present future will be derailed by the growing expansion of government. Every expansion of government takes away more decisions which the people themselves ought to make – locally, in real time community and commerce. It shrinks our ability to steer for ourselves.

The pagan world was non-scientific. Rodney Stark comments:

*“Christianity created Western Civilization. Had the followers of Jesus remained an obscure Jewish sect, most of you would not have learned to read and the rest of you would be reading from hand-copied scrolls. Without a theology committed to reason, progress, and moral equality, today the entire world would be about where non-European societies were in, say, 1800: A world with many astrologers and alchemists but no scientists. A world of despots, lacking universities, banks, factories, eyeglasses, chimneys, and pianos. A world where most infants do not live to the age of five and many women die in childbirth – a world truly living in 'dark ages'”.*¹¹

Stark notes that science (by which most Westerners expect to steer the future), was invented by Christians, not pagans, not secular folks, and that science is inherently Biblical, not secular. Science began in the late Middle Ages out of a free-market of ideas which had been slowly percolating among Greek, Christian, and other philosophers for centuries.¹² That free-market led to the creation of the great universities of Rome, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, *et al*, out of which developed science. For the first time, the Greek talent for logical thinking was systematically imported into the Hebraic world of the particular, time, history, space, and personal relationships. The wedding of logical analysis with our empirical world birthed the empirical sciences.

The Hebrews, because they had a God who communicated to them by written word, had been the earliest to become seriously literate – wanting to know what He said, so as to steer their world. Then Christians, understanding Christ as the Word, the Reason of God, learned to separate out those intellectual tools of Greek philosophy from the Hellenic worldview. Greek tools of the intellect with Hebraic focus on persons-in-relationship was a marriage made in heaven. It gave a whole new substance to the Greek quest for truth, e.g., as begun by Socrates.

Socrates wanted to discover the meaning of man *as man*. We know what a carpenter is *as*

10. Go to www.hawaii.edu/powerkills for statistics on civil government being the central offender against their own as well as other populations. 4/9/14

11. *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, & Western Success*, p. 233

12. Some will point to the contributions of Islam by worthies such Averroes. But the brief romance of Islam with Hellenic philosophy ended with a strangulation sometime during the 10th century. The ultra-conservative Muslim scholars banned philosophy, declaring that Allah had no connection with either reason or morality on the grounds that to think he did would subject Allah to things (reason and morality) outside of himself. Allah was pure will, with no admixture of reason or morality. See Robert Reilly's startling but superb book describing a kind of intellectual suicide, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*. ISBN 9781933859910

carpenter, he said, what carpenters do, how to train them, and how to put them to work for us. But what is man? What is he for? Greek philosophers had no answer because they had no concept of a Creator *ex-nihilo* who could give the world and human beings a purpose for existence.¹³ So the quest for the meaning and purpose of man was insoluble. Steering society was thus left with keeping the power status quo. Pagan morality could not create the necessary bond to steer the human race in a common direction.

But Socrates' question was not insoluble for Jews or Christians. The two Great Commandments give the meaning and purpose of man. We humans are meant to be a part of the community of those who love God, and under God love one another.

6. Moral Consensus: So, Who Steers the Government?

We have touched above on the distinction between the “good” and the “right”. As defined above, the “good” by itself gives us still only an a-moral world. There are no 'shoulds' or 'oughts' in that world. It might possibly be a harmonious world, pleasant and friendly, but that (without moral order) has not proven to happen with consistency. The closed circle world without a moral consensus is a dangerous place to live, where survival requires a fortress and power-pyramid mentality – as we see yet again, rebuilding across our globe.

The king generally undertook to protect local citizens, if only to raise up a respectable army. But the arrival of Biblical religion, with a moral code backed by the authority of the Creator, slowly changed the ways rulers operated,

St. Augustine (ca 354-430) wrote the first ever philosophy of history, *The City of God*. No philosophy of history had ever been written before because pagan peoples saw no meaning to history as a whole, only to their local tribal histories, as they succeeded in conquering or defending against one another. But the Hebrews understood history as God's story, into the living and writing of which we humans were invited.

Augustine noted that the Greeks thought of themselves as the civilized ones, with all others as “barbarians”. No, said, Augustine. The Greeks were not the civilized ones. The only true civilization was the City of God.

The whole of the fallen world was (and is) barbaric, caught firmly in the trap of power-struggle because the pagan world cannot produce an objective moral order by which man can be steered. Tyannical governments were the means for steering societies.

Even Christians, once holding power in Rome, found themselves caught in the power struggle mentality, using coercive force to control pagans and to discipline the thinking of their own people.¹⁴ The notions of a free-market of ideas and freedom of religion were still afar off. The assumption quickly entrenched itself that there should be one religion in the nation, and that the government was to help enforce that one religion. The way of the cross was not yet applied to politics.

But Jesus' dictum that “*the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath...*” meant that the whole of the law, including civil government, was made for man, not man for the law. Along

13. See <http://www.theroadtoemmaus.org/EM/ShpMI/Law&Grace/L&G0%2013E26-9!24pm.pdf> on why the Greek philosophers failed to develop an objective moral theory. If this url does not take you directly there, go to the Addendum: Socrates, Plato, & Aristotle, page 30 at the end of Part I. 4/9/14

14. For an insightful article on this matter of Church control of culture, go to <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godandthemachine/2014/03/dishonestcosmos/> 4/9/14
Or, Google Thomas L. McDonald A Dishonest “Cosmos”

with the principle that every human being is made in the Image of God, it pointed toward a government of, by, and for the people.¹⁵ So, the Biblical notions that every man was equally valuable, and that the law of love trumped all other law, slowly percolated into hearts and minds. The people, armed with a moral consensus under God, would one day begin to steer the government.

But not without firm resistance from those at the top.

7. The Loyal Opposition

A breakthrough came in 1215 at Runnymede, England, with the signing by King John of the Magna Carta, a document inspiring governments all over the world. The barons, with the help of the Archbishop of Canterbury, for the first time in English history forced the king to grant them a share in his powers. There was a trickdown effect of the Magna Carta that eventually extended new freedoms to every Englishman. Those freedoms in turn flowed into the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

Out of this process, there developed in England the notion of “the loyal opposition”, a principle absolutely necessary for a limited government – a monumental “good” for the freedom of the people. Even as late as the 1500's Reformation and into the 1600's, winners of the power struggle, whether by vote or on the battle field, felt pressured to “dispose of” their opposition – because they feared that the defeated opposition would try to dispose of them (as Julius Caesar was murdered by those whom he chose not to murder).

But under the principle of the loyal opposition, the defeated party had a gentleman's agreement (who but the British?) with the winner to not overthrow the winner by force, but to wait for the next election and another chance at ballot box victory. The free-market of ideas was gaining ground. You could at last espouse unpopular ideas and not get burned at the stake.

The Declaration of Independence, which stated to the world the reason for the existence of these newly United States, specified that power would at long last be used for the *protection* of the freedom of the people, not for its trampling. A sea-change in politics.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

All persons equally are entitled to the securing of these rights. The power of coercive force will be directed toward providing that security, not to benefit only those who wield power – a determination made by God Himself. John Wycliffe (d. 1384) noted in his introduction to the first Bible translated into English, that God wanted a government *of, by, and for the people*, centuries later echoed by Abraham Lincoln.

Such an idea was virtually unheard of in the ancient world; and where a whisper was heard (5th century BC Athens), it self-destructed. The Athenians did not know how to harness freedom to moral/political responsibility, and the Spartans did not know how to harness moral/political responsibility to freedom. That harnessing happened primarily through the English political tradition overflowing into the American Declaration and Constitution.

The American presidential election of 1800 was the first ever peaceful transfer of power from one party to another in a major state by popular election. George Washington's party under the

15. Mark 2:27, and Genesis 1:26-28.

presidency of John Adams, accepted the role of the loyal opposition, peacefully stepping down to make way for Thomas Jefferson's party. One can imagine the tensions as the world watched. But Washington had already settled that argument, having firmly refused to make himself king.

8. Church & State

Church and State had vied for control over most of European history. With the help especially of Calvinist theologians, the West preserved the sovereignty of God as a guiding principle for civil government. The trick was to prevent the Church from wielding coercive power.

The secular Enlightenment was beginning to wash ashore from Europe to America at the time of the American revolution, but none of the founding fathers were “deists”, as routinely claimed by modern writers who find God distasteful. A deist believes that God created the world and then let it go on its own – half way to atheism. Every one of the founding fathers believed, to the contrary, that we are both personally and politically responsible to God.

The founders all recognised the fallen nature of man, so that no person or group could be trusted with anything like absolute power. Hence the restrictions on holding power noted above. Both Church and State were understood to be under God, though with different functions. The State was entrusted to deploy coercive power, by deciding which laws to enforce (legislature), by enforcing the laws (executive), and by judging and setting punishment for offenders (judicial).

But the People were understood to be sovereign over the government. The Church, like the legislature, was on the “deciding” (not the “enforcement”) side of law-making, i.e., the role of the Church was to educate the people on how to raise up Godly leaders, and how to hold those leaders accountable at elections – in that same free-market of ideas which began to flourish in the middle ages. The founding fathers routinely attended “election day” sermons. The Presbyterian (Calvinist) clergy had been the spiritual firebrands for the Revolution, preaching firely sermons on the sovereignty of God over all things, including over King George III. The separation of Church and State as commonly thought of today (the exclusion of God or the Church from the public arena) was never a part of the founders' plans.

More importantly, it was not a part of *God's* plans. God loves His people and wants the best. No one other than God and His people has (because no one else can) produce a limited government as described by Wycliffe and Lincoln, of, by, and for the people.

But the full resolution to the Church-State conflict was still only half-baked by the 1789 signing of the Constitution, and even over the 1800's never developed by Christians, thus opening the flood gates for the rising secular Enlightenment, claiming both politics and natural science as its own, stoutly opposing “revelation” and “faith” as outdated.

But the secular Enlightenment did not prove very enlightening, leading to the cultural and military disaster of the 20th century, imposed all around the world by proudly secular governments.¹⁶

In a less openly violent way, the 1962 Supreme Court gave America *Engel v. Vitale*, ruling (wrongly) that prayer was unconstitutional in government schools, dismissing God as sovereign

16. Go to www.hawaii.edu/powerkills for an education on the 20th century secular disaster. The tyrannies were defeated by those Western nations which still had a modicum of Biblical faith and morality. 4/9/14

For a stunning video of Harry Truman's personal testimony, go to <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godandthemachine/2014/03/trumans-amazing-1950-christmas-message/> 4/9/14

(the illegality was *government* in schools, not prayer).¹⁷ The public dismissal of God with no effective Christian response signaled that God and His morality were “out”, self-will was “in”. As one jaded teen said, “*There is no right or wrong, only fun and boring.*”

Crime, violence, divorce, sexual promiscuity shot up immediately and dramatically.¹⁸ Then in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Court dismissed a whole class of persons from their personhood (now it is getting violent) – by 2014, 156-million-and-counting cruelly murdered. In the early 1990’s, probably for the first time in recorded history, *children* began using deadly weapons against their school peers – *for fun* (boredom being the only surviving evil).

We are currently steering our own futures over the cliffs of Godless amorality.

9. How Shall We Then Live?

So, indeed. “How *should* humanity steer the future?” Is there a way back to intellectual, moral, and spiritual sanity – where the enormous power sources of science, politics, and religion can be restrained for good?

If the Biblical cosmos is not true, then in trying to steer the future, we are on our own. There will be no moral consensus to unite us. In a closed cosmos, we puny humans are limited to changing things by the coercive force of government because the people will be morally fragmented. But the larger government gets, the less likely it will respond to the people. And a fragmented people is difficult to govern, requiring a steady increase of the power and scope of government over its citizens. Maybe with drones and internment camps?

Citizen-friendly tyrants are hard to find. Those who have power with no limiting constitution under the higher law of God have a habit of using that power for their own purposes. The possibilities of a rational approach to steering society become very limited – illustrated by the Stark quote above. Lacking moral consensus, there will be no way to avoid continuing the human-on-human atrocities described by R. J. Rummel.¹⁹

The FQXi question for 2013, “*Its from Bits, or Bits from Its*”, was dealing, I believe, with the secular loss of any reasonable notion of causality, which is catastrophic for a philosophy claiming science as its own possession.²⁰ Without a rational notion of cause, how could one possibly explain the ontological security of the world or of ourselves? Neither secularism nor paganism can show us either of the two stabilities required for a rational *moral* or *political* order – leaving the steering of the future “somewhat” problematic.

The general collapse of intellectual credibility among Western Christians has led (rightly) to Christians being chased from discussion of public affairs, though there are growing signs of an intellectual renaissance brewing, perhaps getting Christians back into the public fray to help steer the future.

17. Education is not on the Constitutional list of items for Federal control. Government will eventually turn education into mind-control, and destroy the freemarket of ideas. See <http://www.theroadtoemmaus.org/RdLb/21PbAr/Ed/00Ed.htm#GOVT.CONTROL>

18. See *Original Intent* by David Barton at www.wallbuilders.com. 4/9/14

19. See footnote 16 above.

20. See Earle Fox’s article, *It from Bit, or Bit from It*, his 2013 contribution to the FQXi forum. Go to <http://www.fqxi.org/community/forum/topic/1857> 4/9/14 or to <http://www.theroadtoemmaus.org/RdLb/11Phl/Sci/ID/It%20or%20Bit%20-%20FQXi.htm> for a slightly updated version. 4/9/14

If the future of the closed-circle world is indeed more deeply into power-struggle, as weapons increase in power, leading sooner or later to a “gotterdammerung” (Nordic twilight of the gods, self-annihilation, a return to ultimate chaos), and if the Biblical God is offering a reasonable alternative, a cosmos formed solidly on the love of God and of one another, then the choice seems obvious.

So, if the Biblical view of the world is accurate, if morality is indeed decided by the will of God, and the news really is Good News, then the moral meaning of the question is easy to answer: We should steer as best we know how – God's way, who, being Creator, knows what the world is for and how it operates. (Was that a cheer from Socrates at the back of the room?) The moral order is God's answer to the issue before us – steering the future so that those sources of power (science, politics, and religion) find their mutually cooperative place for the good.

It is all about relationship. So, it would seem, we build heaven with God and each other, or we build hell, in the end, all by ourselves.

It will be decided by our quest for those two stabilities: Ontological and Moral.