

P10 – Follow Principles, not People: Parasites & Power Mongers Abound

Dear: Before providing you with additional evidence to support my claims in the preceding chapter (dealing with how religions cause societies so many problems), in particular, before I offer you the “excursion” **Qx** (through “The Quagmire of ‘Revealed’ Religions”), I want to try to “tie up some loose ends”, dealing with purposes, principles, and production. Specifically, in this chapter I want to try to explain what I mean when I remind myself (while walking, when I get to the letter ‘P’):

Follow principles, not people. Also, try to repay the world’s producers – aware that: “The only way to repay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves.”

The reason I left those “loose ends” dangling is that I wanted to use some of the evidence that I did manage to include in the preceding “P-chapters”.

Unfortunately, substantial complexities reside behind the recommendation to *follow principles, not people*. Below, I’ll identify some of the complexities with three questions [for which I’ll also include “short answers”].

1. Whereas one of the few general principles that can be trusted is “It’s difficult to establish general principles”, *what principles should one follow?* [Short answer: That’s up to you, kid!]
2. *What data, what principles, support the principle “Follow principles, not people”?!* [Short answer: “Power corrupts” and “Parasites and power mongers abound”.]
3. *Whereas humanity has greatly profited from some “highly principled people”, shouldn’t we follow them?* [Short answer: No! Longer answer: Definitely not!]

My plan for the rest of this chapter is “simply” to give you more complete answers to those three questions, starting with the question: *what principles should one follow?*

SOME PRINCIPLES YOU MAY WANT TO FOLLOW

In an attempt to identify some principles that you may want to follow, Dear, I'll begin with the following conditional statement:

- If you agree that a prime purpose of life is to try to continue to live (except for some unfortunate humans who are so overwhelmed by the pain of living that they choose to commit suicide, even without convincing themselves that they're headed for eternal bliss in paradise),
- If you agree that one of your prime purposes is for you to continue to live (setting aside, for a while, whether or not you agree that another prime purpose of yours is to help humanity),
- If you agree with the principle that you can promote your continued living by residing in a community of cooperating humans (and if you don't agree with that principle, Dear, then try living as a hermit for a while – without using anything that other humans have developed; i.e., just you *versus* Mother Nature!), and further,
- If you agree with the principle that in communities of humans “what goes around (generally) comes around”,

then the next step is to adopt additional principles and whatever associated policies that will promote your adopted purpose to live in a community of cooperating humans.

As for what principles and associated policies you might want to adopt, then let me suggest the following for your consideration. I'll list the principles and policies alphabetically. Some may be vaguely familiar to you.

- A – Take time to be aware, of your surroundings and your thoughts.
- B – For complicated decisions, convene a “Board of Governors” in your mind (left brain's analysis, right brain's emotions, body's instincts, and a representative of your universe of experiences).
- C – Be careful of confused thought; be aware of the inter-connectedness of opposites.
- D – Remember the motto: Show me the data!
- E – Evaluate everything, including your emotions.
- F – Dig out causes of your feelings; remember that, besides fight or flight, there's also “fencing off”.

- G – Realize that life's a game, which you win when you begin, but be careful how you choose your goals and how you pick up your winnings.
- H – Careful of hopes (= priorities for your goals) and realize that feeling of happiness are just signals telling you that you think you're making progress toward your goals; therefore, don't seek happiness, make progress – and check your thoughts against data!
- I – Apply ideas that form the basis of the scientific method in your daily life: guess, test, and reassess; thereby, constrain your imagination (because “he who controls your imagination, controls you”); distinguish earned ‘trust’ and ‘confidence’ from misplaced ‘belief’ and ‘faith’; hold your beliefs only as strongly as relevant evidence warrants.
- J – Be your own judge and jury; establish your own “judicial code”, such as: everyone has an equal right to claim one's own existence.
- K – Be kind, if you can, but with keenness; sometimes it's kindest to seem to be cruel.
- L – Love within limits – and when trying to make any decision, “look at the limits”.
- M – Don't forget that the highest moral code is to use your brain as best you can: Evaluate!
- N – Remember that there's gain in saying “No!” – and potential pain, especially from removing masks.
- O – Be open with yourself; be careful forming opinions – base them on data; never forget to ask: What's the objective?
- P – The priorities are: first, premisses; then, purposes – and then principles, priorities, and policies – and finally, plans, procedures, and practices (with perseverance). The prime purpose of life is to live; a prime purpose adopted by intelligent humans is to try to help solve humanity's problems more intelligently.

And oh yes, Dear, there's another principle to consider: **Follow principles, not people!** In fact, there are still other principles that I hope you'll consider, which I'll show you in chapters **Q** through **Z**. But as for what principles you “should adopt”, Dear, that's up to you – which reminds me of the Zen anecdote in which the disciple asked his teacher, “Master, what is the First Principle?”, to which he responded: “If I were to tell you, it would become the Second Principle.” That is, Dear, again: it's up to you. Nonetheless, in your evaluation of the possibility of adopting the principle “follow principles, not people”, I hope you'll consider the following.

Dear, now that “you’re older”, maybe you’re beginning to see that there’s no one whom you can trust to help you more (and who is more competent to help you) than you! Further, as you will unfortunately find (if you haven’t found already), there are a great many parasites and power mongers in the world who desire to use you – to help themselves – rather than to help you. They’ll want you to follow them. To them, I hope that you’ll be able to say, in whatever way works for you: **“No way! I follow principles, not people.”**

SUPPORT FOR: “FOLLOW PRINCIPLES, NOT PEOPLE”

Now, let me try to provide you with a more reasonable response to your imagined question *What data, what principles, support the principle “Follow principles, not people”?* – to which, so far, I’ve provided only the short answer: “Power corrupts” and “Parasites and power mongers abound”. But before starting on my response, I should mention a few relevant points. First, I readily admit that it’s difficult to determine general principles; as I’ve written before, one of the most reliable general principles is: it’s difficult to establish general principles; in later chapters, I’ll list and try to explain some other general principles. Second, let me admit that “power corrupts” isn’t a well-stated “general principle”; better would be something similar to **“Power commonly corrupts”**; that is, power needn’t corrupt, but quite commonly, it does. As for data and the other principle that I claim support the principle **follow principles, not people** (namely, **parasites and power mongers abound**), that’ll take me longer to explain.

Parasites Abound

To start, I should try to be clear about my use of the word ‘parasite’. According to Webster’s dictionary, ‘parasite’ is derived from the Greek words *para*, meaning ‘beside’ (as in parallel), and *sitos*, meaning ‘food’ or ‘grain’; thus, the original meaning of ‘parasite’ was “one who eats at the table of another person”. More generally, Webster gives the following meanings for ‘parasite’:

1. a person, as in ancient Greece, who flatters and amuses his host in return for free meals
2. a person who lives at the expense of another or others without making any useful contribution...
3. [In biology] a plant or animal that lives on or in an organism of another species from which it derives sustenance or protection without benefiting the host and usually doing harm.

Synonyms for ‘parasite’ include **sycophant, toady, hanger-on, leech, and sponger**.

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Actually, though, sycophants are somewhat different from parasites. The dictionary that comes with this word processor defines ‘sycophancy’ as “servility, obsequious flattery, and other fawning behavior” and consistently defines a ‘sycophant’ as “somebody who servilely or obsequiously flatters a powerful person for personal gain.” Therefore, if you think about it for a bit, I expect you’ll see that all religious people in our culture are sycophants: they bow and scrape and plead and pray to their god, usually for personal gain! In my view, therefore, parasites usually aren’t so dumb as sycophants: parasites feed off real producers for real gains; sycophants seem more inclined to seek imaginary gains – even from imaginary beings! Thus, putting it bluntly: clerics are parasites; their followers are sycophants.

Maybe I should mention how I stumbled upon the principle [Parasites abound](#). Sometime in the late 1980s (if I recall correctly), the editor of the *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science* (viz., *Science*) solicited suggestions for “the most important principles in science”. A few issues of the journal later, a list of suggested principles was published, containing many principles that I expected (including principles named after Newton, Darwin, Maxwell, Boltzmann, Planck, Einstein, etc., as well as many others principles that are commonly known by titles rather than authorship, such as the second “law” (better, the second “principle”) of thermodynamics, the conservations “laws” of momentum and of energy-mass, and so on, of course including the principle of causality). In addition, the following principle was listed, perhaps submitted as somewhat-of-a joke (by an author whose name I don’t recall and can’t find!): [Successful systems attract parasites](#).¹

I recall that the author added a list of applications of his principle, from the infestations of grain storages by rodents to the growth of so many government bureaucracies, and from obvious applications in biology (bacteria and viruses) to an explanation of why so many authors affix their names to some scientific papers. Of course I thought of many more illustrations of this principle, and because of my experiences with my mother and your father, all the clerics of the world came to mind. As Voltaire said: “[The first priest was the first rogue who met the first fool](#).”

¹ Dear: On a recent Google search, I found suggestions that the author of the proposed principle “successful systems attract parasites” was the evolutionary biologist Tom Ray; if you’re able to search back issues of *Science*, you might want to try to confirm that attribution.

During the intervening years since I first saw the proposed principle [successful systems attract parasites](#), however, I've come to realize that it's insufficiently general. For example, think about all the “corporate raiders” who pounce on a failing business, paying pennies on the dollar. As another example, on my daily drive to get to my trail, I frequently see scavenging birds feasting on “road kill”. And maybe you remember the smell of that dead horse – from the feast for all sorts of parasites. That is, it's clear that unsuccessful systems also attract parasites. Therefore, I've adopted what seems to be a more general “general principle”: *Parasites abound*.

Meanwhile, more relevant to [Follow principles, not people](#) is that human parasites abound – in every walk of life, in every profession, from bums to billionaires, from “free loaders” to fee chargers, and from family “spongers” to social “gold diggers”. Although certainly not all, many welfare recipients and people living on “disability insurance” are also parasites on our society – as are the billionaire lawyers who “manipulate the system” to gain their own financial advantage, e.g., the damnable lawyers who ripped-off every cigarette smoker in this country, claiming that their collecting billions (from the cigarette makers – ha!) was a “great social service”. Many medical doctors, too, make fortunes from “milking the system”, especially from the suffering (and/or cowardice) of wealthy old people. Further, if these old people don't go broke paying lawyers and doctors, then commonly they'll be harassed by parasitic “gold diggers”, seeking money for every conceivable “cause”, or hustled by all sorts of hucksters (including those claiming ability to communicate with some giant Jabberwock in the sky). And I must admit that a large fraction of “senior citizens” in this country, demanding “government” (i.e., my and your) support for everything from housing to medical care, are parasites (or maybe better “hanger-ons” or leeches), draining the lifeblood from younger generations. But more relevant to my concern for certain grandchildren (because of their indoctrination) is to alert them to clerical parasites.

Clerical Parasites

Dear, think about some differences between clerics and all the producers and “service providers” that you know. Think about all the producers in the world, from artists to farmers and aircraft manufacturers, and think about all those who provide services: your teachers, the police, the fire fighters, the mail carriers, and from those who fix broken windows to computers to those who serve in the armed forces. Now, think about the clerics of the world.

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And whereas your thoughts about Mormon clerics may be biased, think first of the clerics in other religions. No matter how poor we were, my mother would always scrape together some money to give to her Catholic priest, every Sunday. The Pope sits on a treasure that's almost certainly worth many trillions of dollars – and although our family was reduced to eating first our chickens and then their wheat (which is barely edible, no matter how long it's boiled!), the parasitic priest and Pope would keep on collecting money from my mother. Think of the similar children in Boston, Baghdad, Bombay, and Brasilia – and the corresponding clerics, living off the fat of the land. What parasites!

In my opinion, people who consume more than they produce or provide are parasites. Further, since all con artists are parasites and all clerics are con artists, therefore, all clerics are parasites. The opinions of my mother, your other grandmother, and your mother are, however, obviously different. In the case of your mother (and her mother), they've obviously concluded that the Mormon clerics do provide adequate "service" for the tithes (10% of household income) that they (or actually, their husbands) pay. They might admit that this is an enormous fraction of household income to pay just for membership in a social club, but I'm sure they would argue that it's not too much to pay for a ticket to eternal bliss in paradise. Thereby, though, they've just bought into the clerics' con game. As Georges Bizet said: "[Religion is a means of exploitation employed by the strong against the weak; religion is a cloak of ambition, injustice, and vice.](#)"

The purpose of the clerical leaders seems clear. Their protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, they seek power over the people – and all the privileges that such powerful positions provide. Does the President of the Mormon Church, for example, really "need" a one million dollar per year expense account, ALONE!

And actually, such clerical leaders don't ride just on the backs of the producers of the world, they also grab free rides from the efforts of all the low-level clerics whom they send out to "serve in the trenches". If you don't see what I mean, Dear, think about the Pope being carried around in his "pope-mobile", while there are hundreds of thousands of parish priests (for the moment, ignore the pedophiles) walking around in sandals or barefoot, trying to help the people of their parishes.

Some of the methods that clerical leaders use to hang onto their power are clear: 1) forming alliances with politicians, 2) with the politicians assistance, indoctrinating children, 3) an absolutely horrible series of barbaric applications of their power, and 4) ever-more fanciful and exotic (and erotic) shell games. As an example of the latter, in the Islamic shell game, their clerics offer Muslim men (for an annual fee of a “mere” 2.5% of their wealth) not only multiple wives but also, after death, they’re promised 72 perpetual virgins in paradise! Meanwhile, in the Mormon shell game (offering still more for less), Mormon men are conned into believing that, if they pay 10% of their annual income to the clerics (which for rich Americans is usually less than 2.5% of their wealth), then when the men die, they’ll become gods and rule their own worlds – and of course, according to the clerics’ con games, gods get to do (and have) whatever they want!

Now, Dear, once again I need to constrain myself: books have been written about clerical con games. Here, I’ll mention just a couple of points. As for the priests keeping their con game going through barbaric applications of their power, I’ll give you just a single example by quoting from the Bible’s *Exodus 32, 26–30* (again from *The New English Bible*, simply because it’s easier to read) to show you how a (fictitious?) megalomaniac named Moses massacred his fellow Israelites who dared to think differently:

He [Moses] took his place at the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come here to me”; and the Levites all rallied to him. He said to them, “These are the words of the Lord the God of Israel [with whom I just happen to be in direct communication]: ‘Arm yourselves, each of you, with his sword. Go through the camp [of the Israelites!] from gate to gate and back again. Each of you kill his brother, his friend, his neighbor.’” The Levites obeyed, and about three thousand of the people died that day. Moses then said, “Today you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord completely, because you have turned each against his own son and his own brother and so have this day brought a blessing upon yourselves [and are now official members of my Secret Service (SS) Troops who will ensure that, in the future, my every whim is obeyed].”

Dear, if you think that the above quotation reflects just an isolated incident, read the Bible, read about the Inquisition, read about the witch hunts... From the little of what I’ll try to show you in **Qx** and **Yx**, I won’t be surprised if you agree with my conclusion: if religious con artists hadn’t left us with records of their hideous acts, I doubt if people could believe that humans could be so horrible.

As for the shell games that these con artists concocted, they're mind-boggling. Were it not for the hideous consequences of these concoctions, I doubt if people could read about them and constrain their laughter: they're absolutely bizarre. Somerset Maugham's line summarizes it well: "[Give the devil his due!](#)" That is, I must admit that the clerics of the world are champion con-artists.

What I mean, Dear, is that, just as there's a range of competences in every field of endeavor, there's a range of competences of con artists. At the lowest level of con-artist competence are the amateurs (e.g., used-car salesmen), who can sell "the mark" something for more than it's worth; they succeed, because people who fall for con games plan on getting something for less than its worth. Next are the professional con-artists (some of whom are in jail) who sell the mark nothing for something. But the champion con-artists are the clerics: they sell their marks nothing for the most their marks have (namely, their mind, their decisions, their very lives). In addition, in the main, clerical con artists have managed to maintain honorable positions in their communities! Give the devils their due – though I dearly wish that, soon, we'll be able to throw the bums out: would that all clerical con-artists would be confined to each community's garbage dump, doing physical labor of value to each community, with their machinations limited to attempting to convert seagulls and other scavengers to the ways of their lord.

And let me add more, Dear, in case you're unconcerned about con-artist clerics. Please never forget that what they want is control. And unless you resist them, your own children and grandchildren may be forced to serve the con artists or be killed. Thus, Dear, please never dismiss mystics (the believers) and their manipulators (the clerics) as harmless daydreamers.

Your decision is, of course, up to you. But when you get around to making it, I hope you'll seek answers to many questions, such as: Was your family provided adequate goods and services for the payment of their tithes? Do you think similarly of drug dealers? Are they parasites? Do you think that Mormon clerics provide adequate "organizational services"? Do you think similarly of Catholic clerics? How about clerics of Islam and Hinduism? How about organizers of the Ku Klux Klan?

In reaching your decision about whether or not clerics are parasites, Dear, please think about the fortunes amassed by your church and by the leaders of all religions. I haven't been able to find the salary paid to the President of

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your church, but as I already mentioned, I did see that his expense account, alone, was in excess of a million dollars per year. And then, consider his solicitations for still more funds, such as the following (from Gordon B. Hinckley, “Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2000, 2):

The Lord carries great expectations of you in taking care of your part of the burden of moving forward the work of the Lord, in the payment of your tithes and offerings. We have money enough to run this Church because of the faithfulness of the people. Marvelous is that faithfulness. We don't have a lot of rich people in the Church. The money which operates the Church comes from the consecrations of such as you – wonderful, faithful people. Tithing isn't so much a matter of money as it is a matter of faith. The Lord can't bless those who aren't obedient.

Please be careful, Dear, when someone tells you to be obedient. When you were a child and your parents told you that you were “headed for trouble” if you weren't obedient, then maybe you found that their predictions could be validated. But in the future, Dear, when people tell you that, if you aren't obedient (in particular if you don't pay them), then you're “headed for trouble”, be careful. If your dentist, doctor, mechanic, plumber, etc., says something similar, then their predictions may be valid, but when a cleric or any other con artist tells you something similar to “**The Lord can't bless those who aren't obedient**”, then be wary, because *Parasites abound!*

Power Mongers

Actually, Dear, even more so than in the case of parasites, I urge you to be alert to (and react against) those people whom I describe as “power mongers”. They are people who, in their understandable and even desirable quest for power, have decided not only that their ends justify their means but also that the principal means that they are permitted to use violate the fundamental interpersonal moral principle: **everyone has an equal right to claim one's own existence.**

As to how to “react against” power mongers, Dear, it depends on details of each circumstance, some of which I'll try to show you. At the outset, I should remark: of course I agree that, in some cases, the end does justify the means, and I agree that, in some cases, the end can't be achieved without using people. It's rather difficult to build a highway or a bridge, for example, without using people. But, Dear, please don't forget that the means are ends in themselves; therefore, the means must be evaluated to determine which end is more important: the means or the final goal.

Further, Dear, no end justifies using people as means – unless the people are fully aware that they're being used and unless they have given their consent, e.g., paid for helping to build a bridge; i.e., they're given equal value for value received. In contrast, a power monger uses people in the pursuit of his own ends, either without their consent or with their coerced (or brainwashed) consent; therefore, he uses people essentially as his slaves.

By the way, Dear, I used the masculine possessive, 'his', in the previous sentence (e.g., "his slaves") in part because I've found that by far the majority of power mongers are male. In fact, because power mongering is so pervasive among men, I wouldn't be surprised if it's primarily derived from both our animal instincts (so many male animals display it) and from the million-or-so years that human males spent hunting (an activity that no doubt required a considerable amount of organization, with a lead male or "alpha male" barking orders that had to be obeyed immediately).

Nonetheless, power mongering certainly isn't restricted to males. Yet, my personal data base suggests that women are more likely than men to seek cooperation and consent, perhaps because of their own experiences with (male) power mongers and/or perhaps female experiences (of a thousand-or-more generations of women) have made their cooperating more instinctive, resulting in smaller fraction of women, than men, who seek slaves

Such modern-day slave traders and slave owners are everywhere: *Power mongers abound!* The most obvious are the pimps and gang leaders who control their harems of prostitutes and thieves by force, husbands who demand obedience from their wives, business "tycoons" who create hierarchical power structures (common in almost all corporations) and demand obedience from their subordinates, and priests and politicians (typically, in cahoots) who seek to control as much as they can (from pimps to husbands, and from business tycoons to other priests and politicians), demanding obedience from their followers.

Detecting Coercion by Power Mongers

Obvious examples of power mongering (such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph) are like mountain tops poking through a cloud deck. If your "flight plan" is above the clouds, then it's relatively easy to avert such mountains. Much in life, however, is like flying through the clouds, and to detect the full mountain range of power mongers, you'll need to use your instincts like radar to detect all types of coercion.

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The range of such coercion is enormous. Thus, some people want power for what they, society, and maybe even you consider to be “worthy” goals – for example, leaders of groups trying to stop drunk drivers, drug dealers, street crimes, oppression of women, and so on. Other people, though, are more mercenary: usually they want money from you (or whatever else of value you have), although some may want you just as another follower (wanting to gain “safety in numbers”, wanting to buttress their own tenuous positions by having others that they can rely on, and so on). And some con-artist power mongers may want “just” more “cannon fodder”, which they’ll use for anything from sending their recruits out to recruit still more people (e.g., Mormon missionaries and the “Moonies”, who especially want to recruit more people who have more money) to sending out the recruits as “martyrs”, with explosives wrapped around their waists, to fight another “Jihad” (which is what Islamic leaders call a “holy war” and which means to wage war against any threat to the power mongers’ power structure).

But, Dear, certainly you don’t need to consider such extreme cases to detect power mongers (or to calibrate your radar to detect coercion). Instead, realize that people have been trying to influence you almost since the day you were born. Such coercion has taken (and will continue to take) a huge number of forms, from demands from your parents that if you don’t... then..., to reprimands from your teachers that if you don’t... then..., from threats from your boss that if you don’t... then..., to warnings from the police that if you don’t... then.... In fact, Dear, even a certain old grandfather is doing his best to influence you – although I hope you feel no coercion. That is, Dear, to “calibrate your radar” to detect power mongers, it’s necessary to make sure that you’re sensitive to coercion over an enormous range, from careful and considerate recommendations of your best friend to hideous demands of a brutal dictator.

But of more practical value, Dear, to see through all the fog and clouds of special circumstances and situations, I encourage you to tune your radar to detect cases in which someone or some organization attempts to coerce you into how you “should” think and feel. That our laws and law enforcement agencies have power (to influence how we act) can be (and normally is) a source of pleasure, because resulting constraints on all of us can (and normally does) enhance the survival of each of us. Further, that some people (such as actors, writers, singers, and other entertainers) can influence our emotions can be (and normally is) a source of still more pleasure. But, Dear,

set your radar to screech some warning signal when it detects someone trying not just to influence your thoughts but even to control them (especially your emotions and your imagination) – and therefore your acts.

Please realize, Dear, that throughout your life, a huge number of people have been attempting and will continue to attempt to influence your thoughts (in many cases, by influencing your emotions), but a power monger will try to *control* your thoughts (and even you emotions). That is, everyone from your parents and grandparents to your friends, and from sales people to scientists, will try to *influence* your thoughts, but beware of the “sick-ohs” who try to *control* your thoughts (and therefore your acts). Typically, they try to do so by manipulating your emotions and your imaginations. For you, as for everyone, the most dangerous power mongers (and the most hideous power-mongering organizations) are those that attempt to control your imagination. If they (e.g., clerics) succeed, then it’s usually relatively easy for them to control your actions.

Further, Dear, although I hope that you’ll never fall under the blatant power mongering of some religious people, and I trust that, when you encounter some power mongering bureaucrat, you’ll be able to bypass him, yet please beware of more pervasive and more subtle attempts of the “high-priests” of advertising to define you. As I’ve written before and as you well know, advertising is rampant in our society. I expect that the majority of people in this country have their opinions of “beautiful women” and “handsome men” defined for them by the “high priests” of Madison Avenue (the commonly identified home of the leading advertisers). Dear, you’re exquisitely beautiful: there’s not – there never has been – and there never will be – another human such as you; you’re the one of 1 in 10^{100} ; so, never try to be similar to anyone else; tell the high priests of Madison Avenue to “blow it out your collective ears!”

Similarly, Dear, for “peer pressure”. For most people and especially teenagers, peer pressure probably has as much influence as advertising – if not more. As a result and as you know, kids get into all sorts of trouble, from shop lifting, to alcohol and other drugs, to teenage pregnancies, and so on. Please remember, Dear: succumbing to peer pressure means letting others define you. Yet, how can you succumb to peer pressure: you are the one of 1 in 10^{100} ; you have no equivalent; you have no peer! Let them behave as they do; you are you, and it’s for you to define yourself.

Let me put it another way: I dearly hope that, when you leave home, you'll be far more competent than I was in being able to detect power mongers (and to respond to them appropriately). In fact, looking back a half a century, I'm astounded at my naïveté, not only failing to realize that there were so many power mongers in the world but also, in typical youthful brashness, not worrying about those whom I might encounter. When I left home after high school, feeling quite "powerful" myself (!), I suppose I thought that I had left behind all significant power mongers, such as playground bullies, teachers and especially principals (who used physical punishment to enforce their ways), and even my brothers and my mother. In general, I did leave behind the brutality of a certain type of power monger, but slowly over the years, I began to realize that I was still in the midst of power mongers – especially those who reside in large bureaucracies (especially in large companies, political organizations, government agencies including the military, and organized religions).

When you leave home, I expect you'll have similar feelings – and in some ways, maybe you'll feel even more empowered than I did, when you feel free of your parents' and your church's authority. And whereas we all expect that our laws will constrain the brutes, no doubt you expect you'll encounter few (if any) bullies. I certainly hope that's true, Dear, but if you do encounter a power mongering brute, then immediately call the police, because such brutes belong in jail.

But the type of power monger that I essentially guarantee that you'll encounter, Dear, will attempt to control you with other than physical force. That is, similar to bullies, power mongers attempt to control people, but dissimilar to bullies, power mongers don't normally use physical force; instead, they use an enormous array of other techniques to enforce their wills on others. The variety of techniques used is absolutely astounding; for now, I'll alert you to their methods by reminding you of just the warning signal: whenever you feel you're being forced to do something against your will, then be alert to the possibility that you're being coerced by a power monger.

Further, let me try to summarize my recommendations about how to respond when you feel that your being coerced by power mongers. In general, rather than trying to get the police to put them in jail, you'll need to fight them off or fence them off by yourself – or flee from their control. In particular, what I recommend is that, when it comes to a test of wills (yours *versus* a power monger's), you should find yourself some quiet spot, convene your own

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Board of Governors, review and reaffirm those principles that you established in quieter times (based on your dual survival goals), and then stick to your principles! Please, Dear: *follow principles, not people*; listen to yourself, not to others; pursue your own ideas, not those of your peers or your superiors – because, Dear, as I’ve emphasized before, no one is your peer or your superior.

GUARDING AGAINST POWER MONGERS

Now, let me try to give you some practical ways to guard against (or to confine) power mongers. I’ll start by saying that I wanted to give the above recommendations, first, because after one starts digging into details, it’s very easy to get buried in a huge number of special circumstances, exceptions, and caveats. I’ll put it this way: to decide what to do in response to a particular incident of a particular power monger, either find a quiet spot and think it through yourself – or first get your Ph.D. in psychiatry, then spend at least 10 years investigating case studies, and then maybe, by that time, the original problem and the power monger will have disappeared! My point: trying to understand another person can be enormously difficult; therefore, I strongly encourage you to focus on understanding yourself – a task that’s already difficult enough (and apparently too difficult) for most people.

And yes, Dear, I do continue to maintain that the prime goal of everyone is their trio of survival goals, but it can be a horrendous task to determine the bases of someone else’s sense of values. You may find, for example, that a male passenger in your car is trying to coerce you into driving too fast because he likes or dislikes blond hair. The connection between the two (how speeding has anything to do with blond hair) can be totally bizarre. Therefore, Dear, rather than trying to determine the connection, and rather than trying to placate your companion, stick to your principles – and drive at speeds you consider safe. In less bizarre situations, however, especially with your family and friends and in your work environment, you’ll likely need to expend some effort trying to understand and assess other people’s goals or, more accurately, the values that they’ve adopted and pursue.

In making your assessment, Dear, first realize that anyone’s attempt to manipulate or coerce you is normal and may even be an indication of a desire to help you, as well as others. As Bertrand Russell wrote in his book *The Conquest of Happiness* (although I’ve slightly changed the text, to make its style more modern):

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Speaking more generally, one may say that some kind of power forms the normal and legitimate aim of every person whose natural desires are not atrophied. The kind of power that [a person] desires depends upon... predominant passions: one [person] desires power over the actions of [others], another desires power over their thoughts, a third, power over their emotions... The only [person] totally indifferent to power is [someone] totally indifferent to [others]...

Thus, Dear, if you'd list the names of people that you consider to be the greatest politicians or leaders (those with power over the actions of others), the greatest philosophers or educators or scientists or similar (those with power over the thoughts of others), and the greatest actors or singers or writers or similar (those with power over the emotions of others), then the skeptic could say: "You have, here, a huge list of power mongers!" But a kinder person, one less inclined to affix labels to humans, should ask: "What are the goals of these people?" and "What means do they use to achieve their goals?"

That is, Dear, whenever you feel coercion and feel the need to assess it and possibly reject it, then first try to understand how the coercer plans to profit if you take their advice, "buy" their story, follow their lead, obey their orders, etc. In some cases, you'll need to assess the goals even of your parents, grandparents, and friends. In the case of parents, their goals are usually some combination of the following: wanting the best for their offspring [therefore, they'll try to steer you in ways that lead to desirable (and away from undesirable) consequences], wanting their children to "behave" [for the behavior of children is commonly considered some reflection of the parents], wanting their genetic code to succeed, and so on. In the case of grandparents, you'll similarly find a wide range in goals, probably with less concern about your being a reflection of them and more concern about your making choices that they think will help you. And as you know, there's a wide range of goals of your friends, just as there are many reasons why you try to influence them. But besides people with such "good intentions", you'll find a huge number of people in this world who'll seek to coerce you for their own gain. As the American lawyer and statesman Daniel Webster (1782–1852) stated:

Good intentions will always be pleaded for every assumption of authority. It is hardly too strong to say that the [American] Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions. There are men in all ages who mean to govern well, but they mean to govern. They promise to be good masters, but they mean to be masters.

When you encounter people who “mean to be master”, Dear, if you feel the need to judge their intentions, then once again, try to identify the goals that seem to be driving them – leading to their attempt to influence you. For example, be careful that some people (including even parents and certain grandparents) may be trying to influence you to choose goals in an attempt to justify the choices they made for themselves! You may agree with the goals and rules that schools try to instill in kids, but be careful that the schools might be preparing you, most, not so you’ll be able to evaluate ideas for yourself, but so you’ll fit neatly into a society requiring that people “start on cue, work on drudgery, and obey the rules”. With respect to your employer defining goals and rules for you, at least there are two major “saving graces”: one is that your employer will pay you for authority to define your goals and rules; the other is that, at least in our society, you can at any time tell your employer, as in the song, “[Take this job and stuff it!](#)”

Also, no doubt you similarly see why groups of people (societies) want their members to behave according to “certain rules of behavior” and with some “generally accepted goals”. The reasons are various combinations of constraining people, so they won’t damage the lives of others, and of encouraging people to pursue goals that will generally help the development of the group. Normally, such constraints and suggestions are quite acceptable to each of us, since we all benefit from them. For example, if everyone would accept the moral principle “[everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence](#)” and if everyone would agree with the general goal “[to help intelligence expand](#)”, then I’d be absolutely delighted to be associated with such a society!

Similarly, Dear, try to discern the reasons behind the rules society defines in its laws. Thus, you may agree that you’d benefit if others obeyed most of your society’s laws; therefore, you may agree that you, too, will accept the law’s constraints. Be careful, however, because the politicians who created the laws were quite likely responding less to desires to help the “general welfare” than to promote their own or a specific group’s agenda. For example, why are no taxes paid by religious organizations? As a result, those of us who oppose religions must pay more taxes, which means that we’re forced to financially support organizations that promote policies to which we’re opposed. If the shoe were on the other foot, would Mormons, for example, be willing to pay taxes to support atheists?!

Meanwhile, the dominant groups in our society that propose to define what the goals and rules should be (for other people!) are religious organizations. That's their prime "raison d'être" (viz., "reason for being"): they'll tell you that your prime goal is to gain eternal bliss in paradise, that to accomplish that goal, you'll need to "love" their god, "love" your neighbor (and even your enemy), and follow all the rest of their "commandments" in "obedience". As one of the prime movers of both the American and French Revolutions, Thomas Paine, wrote in his book *The Age of Reason* (which is available on the internet):

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish [viz., Islamic], appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

How I hope that, someday, you'll gain sufficient strength to be able to say to any and all religions: "Take your religion and stuff it!"

Thereby, I'm suggesting neither that religions didn't once serve a useful purpose (or, if not useful, at least an understandable purpose) nor that many religious people aren't well intentioned. Thus, if thousands of years ago many people behaved almost as animals, then "carving in stone" some less-animalistic rules for living and trying to force people to obey these "commandments" using "the fear of god" probably was useful. Further, there's no question but that most religious people desire to live in a "moral" society. I just question their thought processes, which have led them to conclude that religions are the best means to achieve this desirable "end". Again, Dear: **the means are ends in themselves.**

More generally, Dear, when you're trying to decide how to react to any coercion, if you have the time and inclination, then rather than just say "Stuff it!", you may want to initiate the difficult but important task of trying to discern the other person's objectives. It's difficult, because the other person's goals may be hidden – sometimes even our own goals seem to be hidden from us! And it can be important to try to discern the other person's goals, Dear, because how you decide to react to any perceived coercion can depend on answers to questions such as: what does the person seek to gain for himself, what does he seek for other reasons (e.g., company objectives), and what if anything in his suggestion is derived from his perception of what would help me?

For example, suppose your boss invites you to a social event. Then, you should ask who'd be there, the purpose of the meeting, what might be accomplished, and so on. If all answers seem to be reasonable ways to accomplish some work-related objectives and if it will not be too much of a hardship for you, then you may want to accept the invitation. On the other hand, if any answer seems weak or suspicious, then inquire about (or suggest) other ways to accomplish the work-related objectives, continuously assaulting your boss with the unspoken concept that absolutely no interaction is appropriate unless it's work related.

Again, Dear, in some circumstances it's important to try to understand the purpose of other people's (and your own!) quest for power. The goal of seeking control over one's environment is commonly the quite understandable struggle to survive. The goal of controlling the actions of others can also be related to one's survival (if you see a fire, I do want you to pull the fire alarm!), but controlling others can become perverse in an enormous number of ways, as you can well imagine. Also, the goals of controlling the thoughts (especially the emotions and imaginations) of others can vary over huge ranges, from the goal of an old grandfather to try to help his grandchildren live well, to the goal of some people to profit financially from their control over others.

But let me try to back off from such details, although as I do, perhaps you are beginning to see what I meant that it's easy to become buried in details. The general idea, with which I hope you agree and which is supported by an enormous amount of data, is that many people (if not most people) seek power. The last book by the philosopher Nietzsche was entitled *The Will to Power*, and his ideas started the psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870–1937) on his brilliant analysis of human behavior (which you can pursue in almost any amount of detail on the internet). It is, however, only in pathological cases that people want power for itself: power is the perceived means to some other end. Therefore, Dear, again: to understand power mongers, then almost always, you'll need to understand their goals.

As you can imagine, the quest for power can be driven by an enormous number of goals. To mention just a few, a power monger might have abnormal fear for his own survival and therefore feels the need to tightly control as much as possible in his environment (including all people with whom he is associated). Another power monger might have had a demeaning experience when he was young, leading to his desire to “get

even” by demeaning those whom he now can (for example, I wonder if most priests who molest children were molested when they were children). Also, maybe some power mongering is instinctive (from our animal past), i.e., the person has little mental control over his actions.

In many cases, however, power mongers seem just to have lost their sense of balance: they become so obsessed with a particular goal (from collecting for some charity to sending a rocket to the moon) that they forget to observe some basic principles (such as everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence), even though, when they are less obsessed with their goal, they heartily agree with such principles.

And as inconsistent as it may seem, the worst power mongers appear to be, in turn, blind followers. I’ve seen it repeatedly: a power monger demanding absolute obedience from his subordinates, who, in turn, was absolutely obedient to his “superior”. Thereby, maybe you see why I suggested that such power mongers seem most pervasive in “bureaucracies”, whose primary characteristic is a hierarchical structure, which is exactly the structure in which power mongers thrive (following orders from above; giving orders, below).

Hierarchical Power Structures

Hierarchical bureaucracies (also called “power structures”!) are apparently needed for any society to run reasonably smoothly and efficiently – and especially for complicated societies such as ours. In such power structures (as in military organizations) important decisions are made by some “commander-in-chief” (President, Chief Executive Officer, Ayatollah, Pope, Church President...) and the entire organization is constructed to efficiently and effectively execute these decisions. The virtuous glue that holds such a power structure together is the single concept: “Obey lawful (or ethical) orders from your superior.”

In such organizations, power mongers thrive, replacing the full “obey lawful orders from your superior” with the single order: “Obey!” During my career, I ran into (or “got under”) two such power mongers, and it’s still a source of satisfaction to me that I managed to end the power mongering of both of them (that is, I forced both of them from their positions, but not without huge cost to my own career and, in one case, the suicide of one of my co-workers – a professor who was the real target of this particular power-mongering Dean). Two recent famous examples of power mongering

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in the US are President Nixon (recall Watergate) and President Clinton (e.g., in his treatment of women). More stark examples of power mongers are Stalin and Hitler.

If you don't want to become involved with power mongers in hierarchical bureaucracies, Dear, then you should aim your education toward the goal of starting your own company – and if you then employ people, you'll become the “commander-in-chief”! On the other hand, if you do become affiliated with some “power structure” (as are probably well over 90% of the people employed in societies such as ours), then there's an important principle that I hope you'll adopt. One statement of this principle is the common phrasing “obey lawful orders from your superior”, but I prefer the much more general statement *follow principles, not people*.

Instead, Dear, if you follow people rather than principles (which is what all power mongers demand), it's quite likely that you'll prosper within a “power structure”! That is, almost certainly you'll move up the organization in your immediate supervisor's wake, for he'll want a subordinate who has demonstrated “unquestioning loyalty”. But thereby you'll succeed only so long as the person (whose orders you unquestionably follow) continues to succeed (who, in turn, is probably following his supervisor with unquestioning obedience). But don't do it, Dear, for several reasons.

One reason not to follow people rather than principles is that any organization that engages in such a policy (or, at least, the part of the organization with which you are affiliated) has become corrupt and will eventually collapse. This corruption and then collapse is a common occurrence in most companies, with their many “management changes”. As I write this, it's now occurring in Japan, where the entire economic (and even social) system has been built on such errors (in which almost all business activities are measured not in terms of “return on investments” but in terms of “return on relationships”).² And of course the corruption and eventual collapse occurred in the worst power structures of the 20th Century: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union – at horrible costs to a huge number of people.

² This impressive statement of Japan's economic malaise was recently made on TV by an MIT economics professor, whose name I didn't catch.

Another reason to follow principles rather than people – a reason more relevant to the point I’m trying to make – is that if, instead, you follow people, then you expose yourself to the whims of power mongers, who then can grab control over any part of your life that interest them (and for men, commonly what they grab from women is some sexual “favors”, e.g., as President Clinton did). That is, if you follow people rather than principles, then in essence, you forfeit your life to the people you follow; you let them define your life; you’re playing your game of life according to someone else’s rules. Thereby, you’ll forfeit your game – and lose.

Religious Power-Pyramids

But power mongering certainly isn’t restricted to the business world: it’s the essence of all political and religious organizations. In fact, all monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism...) are the ultimate in power pyramids, with an all-powerful, all-knowing dictatorial god at the apex, served by a group of subordinate angels, saints, “prophets”, etc., served by the supreme leader of the religion, served by the church hierarchy, and all served by people at the bottom. Such theocracies (i.e., literally, “god rules”, but in reality, the clerics rule) are the exact opposite of democratic systems (i.e., literally, “the people rule”).³

The root problem with theocracies (indeed, with all organized religions) is that the source of their power (to define and enforce rules) is presumed (even by the people!) to reside at the top of the power pyramid (in turn allegedly described in their group’s “holy book” – as interpreted by the group’s clerics). The pawns in such system are the people – who accept the power structure’s burden on them for a variety of reasons, including childhood indoctrination, custom, various fears (including fear of being ostracized from their communities, fear of death, fear of consequences in an afterlife, etc.), greed (including greed for eternal life in a promised paradise), and of course, ignorance (e.g., failure to see that their clerics are running a con game). Thereby, with power (and values) flowing down the pyramid, the people have least power (and least value) – although the people normally feel otherwise, since they imagine that their behavior is “blessed” by no less than the creator of the universe!

³ Dear: If you want to investigate this topic in more detail, you should read A. Uiet Bhor’s essay at <http://www.humanism.me.uk/THE%20GUIDE/Guide%20with%20pics%20compressed%201.5.htm> entitled “An illustrated guide to religious and philosophical architecture”. More of his essays are at <http://www.humanism.me.uk/essay%20section.htm>.

Many consequences of such religious power-pyramids have been horrible. In them, with power flowing from the top (from the all-powerful or “omnipotent” god) to the bottom (the people), values flow in the same direction. The highest value claimed is invariably some form of “worship” of the all-powerful god. The clerics have commonly claimed that people who don’t accept this preeminent “value” (i.e., people who are “heretics”, “infidels”, “atheists”, and similar) are valueless – and they’ve commonly urged that such people be killed. As a result, an enormous number of atrocities have occurred (and continue to occur), perpetrated by religions.

In contrast, in democracies (and in all humanistic systems) power flows from bottom to top – and the members of such systems with greatest “value” are the people themselves. That is, in humanistic systems, the highest values are associated with the welfare, not of some imagined god, but of the people.

Thereby, one can see the fundamental immorality of all theocracies (and all organized religions): they’re anti-human and anti-life – which is one reason why I conclude that **all theists are unscientific antihumans**. They of course claim otherwise: they claim that their entire structure is to enhance life, to link people’s lives to no less than the creator of the universe, and most religions even offer “eternal life”. But no data support the idea that such links are established (except in people’s imagination) or that eternal life is ever achieved. In contrast, vast amounts of data are available showing that, through application of such schemes, an enormous number of people’s lives have been totally wasted (if not eliminated, because they were “heretics”, “infidels”, “atheists”, or similar). Consequently, in so far as enhancing life is the only sound basis for all morality, **all organized religions are immoral**.

But setting aside (at least for a while!) such general criticisms of religious organizations, I admit that hierarchical organizations are needed in a society as complicated as ours. For example, if the President chooses to adopt a certain “plank” of his party’s “platform” (e.g., to support or to oppose abortions), then all “obedient” party members must follow this choice. Therefore, Dear, if you become an active participant in society, it’ll be extremely difficult to avoid involvement in various power structures. And therefore, again I urge you to consider adopting something similar to *follow principles, not people*. Thereby, if the principles that you adopt are of your own choosing, you’ll continue to own your own existence – you’ll continue to be able to define your own goals and rules for living your own life.

AVOID FOLLOWING EVEN “HIGHLY PRINCIPLED” PEOPLE

Yet, you may object. You might say something similar to what I wrote near the beginning of this chapter: “Whereas humanity has greatly profited from some ‘highly principled people,’ shouldn’t others follow such people?” I repeat both my short answer, “No!”, and my longer answer, “Definitely not!” I’ll now try to explain both answers, with a still longer answer.

I freely admit, with gratitude, that there have been (and still are) some “highly principled people”. I immediately think of Confucius, the Buddha, Zoroaster, Heraclitus, Socrates, Hippocrates, Epicurus, Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, David Hume, Robert (or “Robbie”) Burns, Thomas Paine, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, Goethe, Ingersoll, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others, including some university presidents whom I knew personally. I would also add that one of my few friends, a co-worker for 20 years, was one of the greatest guys I could ever hope to know. In each case, however, I could find justifications for my generalization not to follow any of them – although I’d willing adopt some of the principles that they advocated and put into practice.

Now, certainly I’m not going to illustrate my immediately preceding statement by showing you deficiencies in some of the principles, policies, and practices of every one of those “highly principled people”, but let me give you at least a few illustration of what I mean, specifically for Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus.

Confucius

Confucius (or Kung Fu Tse, viz., inverted, “the master Kung”, ~555–479 BCE) must have been one of the most brilliant and “highly principled” persons who ever lived. I wouldn’t be surprised if, through the subsequent centuries, he has had more “followers” than has anyone else who ever lived – although most follow his philosophy (it’s not a religion) rather than him. Consider a few of his ideas, as given in Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations*, in turn from *The Confucian Analects*.⁴

- If a man takes no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand.
- Hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles. Have no friends not equal to yourself. When you have faults, do not fear to abandon them.

⁴ Available online at the wonderful electronic library at <http://classics.mit.edu>.

- By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart.
- When we see men of worth, we should think of equaling them; when we see men of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and examine ourselves.
- The scholar who cherishes the love of comfort is not fit to be deemed a scholar... Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.
- The superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions... The superior man is distressed by his want of ability...
- There are three things which the superior man guards against: in youth... lust, when he is strong... quarrelsomeness, when he is old... covetousness.
- While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve spirits [of the dead]?... While you do not know life, how can you know about death?
- What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others... Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness.
- To be able to practice five things everywhere under heaven constitutes perfect virtue... [They are] gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness.

I doubt if I agree with anyone more than I agree with master Kung!
Consider a few more of his ideas, as given in *The Analects*:

- The Master [Confucius] said, “Shan, my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity.” The disciple Tsang replied, “Yes.” The Master went out, and the other disciples asked, saying, “What do his words mean?” Tsang said, “The doctrine of our master is to be true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others; this and nothing more.”
- There were four things from which the Master was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism.
- Fan Ch’ih asked what constituted wisdom. The Master said, “To give one’s self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom.”

Yet, I disagree with some principles advocated by Confucius, for example:

- The people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it. [I agree that he “hedged his bet” by saying they “may” not be made to understand it, but I would have had him advocate the policy of still trying to make all people understand. I haven’t yet given up on people!]

- When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it – this is knowledge. [That’s gobbledygook – a word game – bouncing the undefined verb “to know” against the undefined noun ‘knowledge’. It would have been better if the last clause was “this is the beginning of wisdom”, but I can’t read Chinese and therefore don’t know his intent. If it’s not a translation error, then I expect the cause of the inadequacy in his statement was the pre-scientific state of his world, i.e., before it was known what ‘knowledge’ means, which is a topic that I’ll get to in the “T-chapters”.]

My more significant dissatisfaction with Confucius’ ideas, however, is derived from my reading *The Analects* and finding that he failed to mention what should have been obvious to him. Thus, when he dined (though he ate sparingly) he was served good food prepared by others, when he went to the “royal court” he wore fine clothes and rode in carriages, at court he spoke of military equipment and ships, and so on; yet, I found neither praise for nor acknowledgment of his indebtedness to the producers of the world. He promoted “self knowledge” and “the doctrine of the mean” (similar to the wisdom of the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece: “know thyself” and “nothing too much”), he advocated justice, kindness, reciprocity, and so on for interpersonal relationships, but that isn’t enough! He neglected what might be called “impersonal” relationships.

That is, Dear, I found no evidence that Confucius recognized that, on the one hand, he was the beneficiary of a huge number of accomplishments by preceding producers (e.g., inventors of the wheel and of writing!), and that, on the other hand, “the only way to pay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves.” Granted that humanity is hugely in debt to the wisdom of Confucius, but we would have been even more in debt to him if he had said something similar to:

You eat good food, you wear fine clothes, you ride in carriages and ships, you defend your villages with powerful weapons. What will you produce to try to pay for all that you consume?

Similarly, Dear: what will you produce to pay your debt to Faraday for discovering the principle of the dynamo, Edison for inventing the light bulb, Jonas Salk for discovering a vaccine against polio, and so on? Of course I don’t know and don’t expect you to know the answer to that question, but I’d suggest that you wouldn’t be able to repay your debt by following Confucius – even though you may want to follow many of his principles.

The Buddha

Similar to Confucius, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, ~563–479 BCE) was an astoundingly brilliant founder of a philosophy (not a religion, although some of his followers mangled his ideas into a form of religion). In earlier chapters (e.g., in **K** and **L**), I showed you some of his ideas; here, first, let me show you some ideas of his “followers” – who follow his principles, not him!

For example, the following exchange is described in *The World of the Buddha* by Lucien Stryk (Grove Press, N.Y., 1968):

Ex-Emperor: “Gudo, what happens to the man of enlightenment and the man of illusion after death?”

Gudo (1579–1661, Rinzai): “How should I know sir?”

Ex-Emperor: “Why, because you’re a master!”

Gudo: “Yes, sir, but not a dead one!”

Another and a modern example is described by Jeffery Paine in an article entitled “The Buddha of suburbia; The Dalai Lama’s American religion” (*The Boston Globe*, 2003/9/14):

The Dalai Lama has even declared, “If the words of the Buddha and the findings of modern science contradict each other, then the former have to go.” Try to imagine the pope or an ayatollah making a similar statement about the New Testament or the Koran.

But more to the point, Dear, although the Buddha recommended some great principles (a century later, probably put into the Old Testament and attributed to Moses by Ezra and co-authors, and five centuries later, almost certainly copied by the clerical authors of the New Testament and attributed to their Jesus), yet the Buddha also promoted some glaringly dumb ideas – and therefore again, Dear, “follow principles, not people.”

Illustrative of some of the Buddha’s “dumb ideas” are those that are at the core of his philosophy. Buddhists call these ideas “The Four Noble Truths”, two translations of which I’ll show you below. The first translations, which I’ve put in ordinary type, is from *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*; the second translation, which I’ve put in italics, is from the book *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* by Edward Conze (Harper and Row, N.Y., 1959).

This is the noble truth of sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow... in short, all the five components of individuality [khandas] are sorrow.

What then is the Holy Truth of Ill? Birth is ill, decay is ill, sickness is ill, death is ill. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also that means suffering. In short, all grasping at (any of) the five skandhas [Yes, Dear, the spelling is different!] (involves) suffering.

And this is the noble truth of the arising of sorrow. It arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion...

What then is the Holy Truth of the Origination of Ill? It is that craving which leads to rebirth, accompanied by delight and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there, i.e., craving for sensuous experience, craving to perpetuate oneself, craving for extinction [which maybe means “getting off” the re-incarnation “treadmill”].

And this is the noble truth of the stopping of sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving... being emancipated from it...

What then is the Holy Truth of the Stopping of Ill? It is the complete stopping of that craving, the withdrawal from it, the renouncing of it, throwing it back, liberation from it, non-attachment to it.

And this is the noble truth of the way which leads to the stopping of sorrow. It is the noble eightfold path... right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation.

What then is the Holy Truth of the steps which lead to the stopping of Ill? It is the holy eight-fold Path, which consists of: right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

If your first reaction to these ideas is something similar to “Say what?”, then, Dear, welcome to the club! Maybe “the worst of it” is being left with the question: “Whaddya mean ‘right’?”

It may be easiest to understand what the Buddha seems to have been trying to communicate by reading how he gained his “enlightenment”. I’ll show you this by quoting from *World of the Buddha* (already referenced), which in turn quotes the *Jataka Book* on the phases of the Buddha’s life.

The future Buddha [when he was a prince] in his splendid chariot entered the city with a pomp and magnificence of glory that enraptured all minds. At the same moment Kisa Gotami, a virgin of the warrior caste [of the Hindu caste system],

ascended to the roof of her palace, and beheld the beauty and majesty of the Future Buddha, as he circumambulated the city; and in her pleasure and satisfaction at the sight, she burst forth into this song of joy:

Full happy now that mother is,
 Full happy now that father is,
 Full happy now that woman is,
 Who owns this lord so glorious!

On hearing this, the Future Buddha thought, “In beholding a handsome figure the heart of a mother attains Nirvana, the heart of a father attains Nirvana, the heart of a wife attains Nirvana. This is what she says [in her song]. But wherein does Nirvana consist?” And to him, whose mind was already averse to passion, the answer came: “When the fire of lust is extinct, that is Nirvana; when the fires of hatred and infatuation are extinct, that is Nirvana; when pride, false belief, and all other passions and torments are extinct, that is Nirvana. She [the singing woman] has taught me a good lesson. Certainly, Nirvana is what I am looking for. It behooves me this very day to quit the household life, and to retire from the world in quest of Nirvana”...

Thereby, Dear, maybe you see what the Buddha was getting at with his “Four Noble Truths”. He identified the source of sorrow to be passion, and concluded that sorrow would be eliminated by becoming an ‘ascetic’ [“one who chooses an austere life of self-denial”]. Thus, he proposed a fourth method for people to confront their problems: not just the familiar “fight or flights”, and not “fence them off” (all three of which require concerted actions), but just imagine your problems out of existence! That’s why meditation (derived from Hinduism) is central to Buddhism: it’s to gain sufficient control of your mind (especially your instincts and emotions), not only to permit you to walk on burning coals but also to permit you to become oblivious to the world and its problems. In a nutshell, Buddha decided to just “drop out” of society, as did the “drop-outs” of the sixties in this country.

And thereby, too, maybe you can why I described some of the Buddha’s ideas as “glaringly dumb”. He apparently hadn’t heard the wisdom from China about “the interconnectedness of opposites”, which was known for centuries earlier, which is the foundation of Taoism, and which was recorded by Lao-tzu a couple of generations before the Buddha. The Buddha concluded:

This is the noble truth of sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow... in short, all the five components of individuality [khandas] are sorrow.

But if he had read Lao-tzu's book or had thought about the matter a little more by himself, he might have concluded something similar to:

This is the noble truth of the interconnectedness of opposites: birth can bring great sadness and great joy; age can cause great sadness and great joy; disease is a cause of sorrow, its absence should be a cause of happiness; death can cause mourners sorrow, until they reflect on life... In short, there's no such thing as a one-ended stick, no such thing as a one-sided coin. Sorrow and joy are interconnected: without sorrow, there could be no joy.

Also, maybe you can see the self-contradictions in Buddha's ideas. He passionately sought "Nirvana", which is a totally passionless state! I certainly hope that, while trying to do so, all those who follow the Buddha have fun – because the goal they seek is quite impossible to attain: if one's passion is to reach a passionless state, then... [Duh!] Instead, maybe they'd like to consider the possibility of following principles rather than people.

Socrates

Another example is Socrates (469–399 BCE), whose birth occurred ten years after the year that Confucius (and the Buddha) died and who surely also should be ranked as one of the most brilliant humans who has ever lived. But I plan to save (and savor!) most of my comments about Socrates until later chapters (e.g., in **V**, **W**, and **X**) and, here, mention only one of his principles that I hope you'll consider most carefully, namely: "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance", and mention why I would recommend that you refuse to follow even Socrates.

My "complaints" against Socrates are related not only to my concern that the above quoted statement could be improved if stated in a form such as "There is only one good, willingness [or even "eagerness"] to learn, and one evil, refusal" but also to his decision to abide by Athens's "justice" – which essentially meant that he chose to commit suicide. With respect to my second "complaint", first recall (from an earlier chapter) the indictment against him (no doubt promoted by the clerics of his time):

Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods in which the state believes, but brings in other new divinities; he also wrongs by corrupting the youth.

At his trial (reports of which you can find on the internet in Plato's *The Apology*, some of which I quoted in **Ix11**), Socrates was convicted and sentenced to death by drinking a poison made from hemlock. When he was

* Go to other chapters via

in prison awaiting his execution, his friend Citro attempted to convince him to escape (which Citro explained would have been relatively easy), but Socrates refused to try, arguing (as reported by Plato) that it was best for him to do what he considered right, that “we ought neither to requite wrong with wrong nor to do evil to anyone, no matter what he may have done to us”, which is similar to what Confucius said, with which I can easily agree, and which ~500 years later was incorporated into the New Testament.

But Socrates went further. Whereas he had previously agreed (by his choice to remain in Athens) to abide by Athenian laws, then in his opinion, the right course (even when his trial had been a mockery of justice) was to abide by the court’s decision, to remain in prison and be executed. I disagree with his conclusion. When one is convinced that the laws or the courts violate one’s perception of justice, then (along with Thoreau, the brave women of the women’s suffrage movement, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and many others) I’d encourage civil disobedience – provided that force isn’t used against other people. Yet, although I think Socrates was wrong not to try to escape, I can’t help admiring him for his argument, his conviction, and his courage to do what he considered right.

Jesus

But I expect, Dear, that you’re not particularly interested in following Confucius, the Buddha, or Socrates. Instead, ever since you were a baby, you’ve been instructed “to follow the Lord Jesus.” And I readily admit that both the clerics’ Jesus and the Gnostics’ Jesus advocated a few good ideas, e.g., for people to be as moral as dolphins! Yet, Dear, I very much hope that you’ll examine your indoctrination critically, because if you do, I’m certain you’ll find that the Jesus depicted by both the clerics (in the New Testament) and the Gnostics (in the “Gospels” found at Nag Hammadi) isn’t someone that any sane person should follow.

Below, I’ll list reasons for that conclusion. Yet, until **Qx**, I’m not going to show you the substantial evidence that justifies the following list of idiocies advocated by the clerics’ Jesus. Nonetheless, from what I’ve already shown you in prior chapters plus from what you’ve been taught since you were a baby, maybe you can begin to see some justification in my assessment of the depicted Jesus, because:

- He didn’t see that the only sound basis for morality was to use one’s brain as best one can,

- He held such distorted views of natural, personal, and social justice (believing in miracles, advocating prayer, advising people to seek “justice” only after they’re dead),
- He advocated obeying laws and rulers regardless of their morality,
- He didn’t understand the purpose of punishment (viz., to modify and, if necessary, eliminate certain behavior, not to make people suffer),
- He threatened torture of humans (and not for a few seconds, not for a few minutes, not for... but for eternity!),
- He didn’t understand the meanings of friends or money (e.g., he said that friends could be bought with money and suggested that money was evil),
- He neither promoted intelligence nor thanked the producers of the world,
- He was a hypocrite, telling people not to be hypocritical while calling others hypocrites and not to criticize others while criticizing,
- He didn’t see the errors in his “do unto others...” (compared with “the standard” of the day, from Zoroaster, Confucius, the Buddha, and others, which was “don’t do unto others what you don’t want done to you”),
- He didn’t see his error in promoting “giving” in order “to get”,
- He taught that we should hate ourselves,
- He didn’t comprehend the double binds that he was advocating by advising his followers to “judge not”, “love thy enemies”, and “love thy neighbor as thyself” (while hating yourself!),
- He “believed” that something existed – such as ghosts and spirits and gods – having no data to support such assumptions and failing to see that no data could ever be obtained, and so on, including
- He continued to promote his idiotic ideas even when he realized that he was damaging the fundamental social unit, i.e., families.

Now, Dear, maybe I should commit some space, here, explaining the difference that I see between ignorance and evil, but I've decided to delay showing you what I mean until I can address the subject in more detail in later chapters (e.g., in **V**, dealing with "Values" and in **Y4** dealing with "Your Principles and Policies"). Also, maybe I should commit some space, here, explaining why I strongly recommend that you don't follow (such psychotics as) "Saint" Paul and Sidney Rigdon or (such narcissistic megalomaniacs as) Muhammad and Joseph Smith, but I've decided to delay showing you what I mean until I review more about them in the "excursions" **Qx** and **Yx**. So, for now, I'll leave the subject with my strong encouragement for you to **follow principles, not people**.

And by encouraging you to consider the principle "follow principles, not people", I urge you to refuse to follow anyone – even a certain grandfather – and even your parents! My point, Dear, is that, whoever the person is, he or she will probably advocate some reasonably sound principles, but simultaneously, will probably advocate a lot of principles that are not only ignorant but even evil. Thus, Dear, in general, please don't think as others think (including me!), and certainly don't think thoughts others say you must think – or else... Otherwise, if you think only thoughts already thought by others, no progress toward understanding will be achieved. Instead, Dear, please think for yourself – and then, act only upon your thoughts consistent with the most reliable data that you can acquire about reality.

Yet, I'm not suggesting that you won't find that other people have identified some sound principles. For example, in the above, I showed you some good ideas from Confucius, the Buddha, and Socrates; below, I'll briefly mention some good ideas advocated by others.

- As I showed you in an earlier chapter, (the fictional character?) Moses advocated the sound principle "you shall love your neighbor as... yourself", but as I'll show you in **Qx**, he also advocated many dumb principles (e.g., how to beat your slaves to death and how to sell your daughter into slavery). I therefore hope (and trust) that you'll refuse to follow Moses and adopt only those of his principles you consider sound.
- Both the clerics' and the Gnostics' Jesus advocated the sound principle of separating church and state, but as you can see from the list given above, both the clerics' and the Gnostics' Jesus advocated many dumb principles. I therefore hope, Dear, that you won't follow your clerics' advice to follow Jesus, and instead, that you'll evaluate all principles by yourself – to decide which (if any) you want to adopt.

- Muhammad advocated the sound principle that skin color was of no significance, but he also advocated the horrible principle that women were inferior to men (at making babies?!) and he advocated and executed the horrible policy of murdering “infidels” (i.e., those whose “sin” is to think that insufficient data supports his speculations that Allah exists). Therefore, Dear, I hope you choose to follow principles, not people.
- And as my final example, Dear, please don’t follow Joseph Smith (or Sidney Rigdon). Yes, some good principles can be found in the Book of Mormon, such as its ridiculing (at least partially) the idea of “original sin” and protecting women and young girls from polygamy, but other principles advocated in the Book of Mormon are absolutely horrible (such as killing those who disagree with the idea of God, discriminating against people who aren’t “white”, and of course, the idiotic policy of paying the clerics 10% of your income).

Again, Dear, please **follow principles not people**. And again, Dear, please be careful. Be kind, but be skeptical. The only person that you should follow is you! Define your own goals and rules. Decide, for yourself, what principles you’ll follow. If others share your principles, you may want to work with them to achieve common goals. But please, never slip into the easy way of following people rather than principles.

BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL OF ORGANIZED RELIGIONS

In the case of organized religions, please be especially careful. In contrast to “unorganized religions” (such as Taoism or those “religions” that reject the entire concept of anything supernatural), the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism...) provide a near-perfect structure to support power mongers. As I already mentioned, at the top of such power pyramids is a “vengeful and jealous god” (the Bible’s words, not mine!), next is some high priest whose word is law on earth, and beneath him is a hierarchy of lesser power mongers (e.g., in the case of Catholics, the cardinals, bishops, priests and so on). Within such a power structure are power-mongering priests who, for example, will take their sexual frustrations out on nuns, on women who trust them, and even on alter boys. Among the many powers that such mongers grant themselves is the power to forgive the sins of their “subjects” (and, of course, they conveniently grab the power to define which acts are sinful, not acknowledging that one of the worst conceivable sins is to grab authority over other people’s lives); that is, they violate what I consider to be a fundamental moral principle: **everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence**.

Such religious power mongers have polluted, distorted, and contorted humanity for more than 5,000 years, some evidence for which (e.g., in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia), I'll show you in the "excursion" **Yx**, dealing with "Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie." I'll show you more evidence in the "excursion" **Qx**, where I'll go through the quagmire of the "holy books" of our culture. Here, I'll mention just a hopeful turn, which in turn was derived from one of the worst cases of power mongering that the world has ever experienced.

For our culture, during the past 3,000 years and more, Judaism has been a horrible example for all hideous power structures. In this religion (an amalgamation of the ancient Egyptian priestly power structure with the religion of the Persians), "God's chosen people" are required to obey the clerics of their vengeful and powerful god. All religions of our culture copied this construct, but now, courtesy Hitler and his Nazis, Judaism is finally decaying. This decay didn't follow because Hitler and his henchmen managed to kill all the Jews; instead, Hitler demonstrated to the Jews the consequences of their own principal errors: 1) promoting racism (the Nazis claimed to be another "chosen people"), 2) promoting obedience (don't think, obey), and 3) promoting the interests of "us" over "them" (an "in group" that needs an "out group" to prey upon). I hope (and even expect) that all people in all the other organized religions will similarly see their errors, finally ridding the world of all religious pollution.

At the Nuremberg trial, Nazis tried to use the defense "I was only following orders." But, Dear, the court rejected that defense, and more relevant to you, you'll find that you, also, will reject such a defense when you come to judge yourself. Of course you may come to the conclusion that you were following the wrong principles, but even then, you'll have a defense that you'll find acceptable to yourself: "At that time, some of my principles may have been wrong, but even then, one of my most important principle was right: I did my best to follow principles rather than people."

Surely to science, someday soon, people will realize that their purpose is not to obey some fictitious god (and his self-appointed spokesmen). Surely people will see that our purpose is "simply" to help humanity progress – even to reach the heavens – after we've helped people here on Earth become happier, by giving everyone the opportunity to pursue their own self-defined goals, with maximum education and minimum indoctrination, and by laughing all religions out of existence!

Such laughter brings me back to how (as I showed you in earlier chapters) I start my review with the letter ‘P’:

Philosophy – the only serious philosophical question is how to stop laughing! We’re just tubes... so many tied in knots... without a purpose other than reproduction, following people rather than a few simple principles.

Thus, Dear, although much credit is due the first molecule that learned how to reproduce itself (and has been continuing to do so, now, for about four billion years!), yet still, it’s rather dumb. It knows how to eat, eliminate wastes, and reproduce, but it’s oblivious to the pains of those it eats, it’s damn near suffocating in its own wastes, and its proclivity to reproduce desperately needs constraints. Further, it has no idea that the Earth’s resources are finite, that the Sun won’t last forever, that the Andromeda galaxy will collide with ours, and that there’s a universe out there as an almost infinite frontier to be explored. To improve, to grow, to survive, it desperately needs some help – and currently, our brains are its only hope!

And now that we humans have wasted thousands of years in foolish follies trying to placate nonexistent gods, building citadels to ignorance (such as the pyramids and all temples, synagogues, churches, and mosques), and generally making life miserable for millions and billions of other humans because of confused ideas about the purpose of the purpose, it’s high time for fresh, wiggly tubes such as you to try to do a better job. Put on your thinking cap, kid, and see if you can help humanity continue: adopt principles that you can deduce, by yourself, using your brain as best you can.

That is, Dear, I strongly encourage you to use your brain as best you can to sort out sound from stupid principles, adopt the sound principles, and follow such principles, rather than the people who advocate them. And when someone asks you what your religion is, how I hope that someday you’ll be able to answer something similar to:

My religion? I’m not a Mormon, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Jew. I’m a human: I choose to think for myself. I follow principles, not people.

THANK THE PRODUCERS – BY PRODUCING!

Finally for these P-chapters, Dear, let me turn to what I remind myself with:

*...remember to thank and to try to repay the producers of the world, fully aware that
“The only way to repay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves.”*

I know that I’ve harped on this subject before, but let me try to put it another way, summarized well by Thomas Sowell, who wrote:

One of the sad signs of our times is that we have demonized those who produce, subsidized those who refuse to produce, and canonized those who complain.

Dear: All that gods ever were, and all that gods ever will be, are just symbols for various things and processes. Thus, there were gods of thunder, gods of mountains, gods of tribes, gods of cities, gods of war, gods of truth, gods of justice, gods of love, and so on. The god that has dominated our culture for the past 2,000 years is the clerics’ Jesus, a symbolic god of love.

But people have adopted an inappropriate symbol, because the clerics’ perception of love is myopic. Certainly, data support the idea that such love has great appeal to many people (especially oversexed teenage boys, young girls with a Cinderella complex, homosexual men who want to follow some male leader, and lonely old women), but such love is mostly self-indulgence.

Helping an old woman across the street, giving alms, serving food at a soup kitchen, etc., are activities that any normal dolphin would approve, but such activities aren’t the best of what’s human:

- When you get up in the morning, you put on your clothes. Competent workers produced those clothes from various raw materials. Don’t put on your best clothes to go to church to worship some “god of love”; when you put on your clothes, each and every morning, thank the workers who produced your clothes.
- When you go to have breakfast, realize that competent farmers produced that food, and through an amazing distribution system, that food appears on your table. If you “say grace”, don’t thank “the Lord”, thank the producers and distributors.
- When you head out in the morning, on a road, riding a vehicle, toward your day’s activities, don’t thank “the Lord”; again, thank all the producers who have provided you so much.

- And when you return home, think of all the bounty of which you are the recipient (the answering machine, the bedspread, everything from cups and cutlery and from chairs to computers, dishes, “entertainment centers”, everything from the floor and the faucets to the phone and the fridge...) and then pause to again thank the producers of the world.

And thus, Dear, a “god of love” is the wrong symbol. A far better symbol for the best of what is human would be a god of productivity. That is, Dear, an appropriate symbol for human progress is not some god of love; it’s somebody who produces.

And how to serve this “god of productivity” (i.e., how to serve your fellow humans)? Well, here’s a hint: people should get up off their knees, get off their prayer mat, and start producing!

Produce what? That depends on their unique talents. I don’t know what you’ll produce, Dear (clothes, food, roads, cars, houses, new appliances, tools, airplanes, a beautiful composition, a new medical procedure, a safer nuclear reactor, an important vaccine, a method for stopping the apocalyptic asteroid...), but I’m quite certain that whatever it will be, then you’ll need to apply yourself to the best of your abilities. As Einstein said:

[We have to do the best we can. This is our sacred human responsibility.](#)

But then, don’t forget that, to do your best, you’ll need to take care of your health, which means getting more exercise, which means...