

## Q2 – Quality & Quotations

Dear: In this chapter, let me try to show you what I mean by the rest of what I remind myself with “Q” when I’m walking, namely:

**Q:** *Quality – as much as time permits (including interactions with people).*

*Quotations: The quotes from Emerson and Churchill notwithstanding, do read Bartlett’s again – in spite of its biases and misrepresentations.*

Thirty-or-so years ago, I reached the conclusion *Quality – as much as time permits (including interactions with people)* in reaction to a great book by Robert Pirsig entitled *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I encourage you to read it, when you have some “free time” – say some weekend. In his book (which, by the way, has little to do with motorcycles), Pirsig does a wonderful job demonstrating how to overcome one of the major problems facing modern humans: alienation from our environments, caused not only by our lack of awareness but also by the complexities of our environments compared with our competences.

For example, Dear, consider your own alienation from your environment (e.g., as you use your computer, search on the internet, “nuke” some food in the microwave, have dinner, and then watch TV) compared with involvements of your ancestors with their environments, say 50,000 years ago (e.g., as they found some flint and a sturdy pole, made a spear, killed an animal, built a fire, ate, and then participated in the telling of stories). That’s not to suggest, however, that our ancient ancestors didn’t feel that their environments were beyond their control. After all, no doubt they invented their gods in part because they felt that their environments were otherwise out of control: imagining that their gods controlled the wind, rain, floods, volcanoes, stars, etc., including life, death, and even life after death, our ancient ancestors then busied themselves trying to influence their imagined gods (with “burnt offerings”, “hecatombs”, “sacrifices” of children, and so on), thereby trying to gain control of their environments. And actually, if our ancient ancestors could revisit the world (finding fire instantly available in the kitchen, meat in the supermarket, men on the moon, and telescopes on spacecraft looking at the edge of the universe), they’d probably abandon their imagined gods, concluding that we had so much control of our environments that we were the gods!

Yet, for both them and us, dissatisfactions arise if we conclude that our environment is out of our control, felt as a threat to our survival. The solution to this “problem of alienation” recommended by Pirsig (and consistent with Zen) is to increase the quality of our interactions with things, processes, and people in our environments. In his book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Pirsig maintains that such “quality interactions” yield “peace of mind”:

So the thing to do when working on a motorcycle, as in any other task, is to cultivate the peace of mind which does not separate one’s self from one’s surroundings. When that is done successfully, then everything else follows naturally. Peace of mind produces right values, right values produce right thoughts, right thoughts produce right actions, and right actions produce work which will be a material reflection, for others to see, of the serenity at the center of it all... The place to improve the world is first in one’s own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there...

In his book *Disturbing the Universe*, the Nobel laureate in physics Freeman Dyson wrote something similar for the case of working in science:

Much of the joy of science is the joy of solid work done by skilled workmen. Many of us are happy to spend our lives in collaborative efforts where to be reliable is more important than to be original. There is great satisfaction in building good tools for other people to use. We do not all have the talent to be *prima donnas*. The essential factor which keeps the scientific enterprise healthy is [besides honesty!] a shared respect for quality. Everybody can take pride in the quality of his own work, and we expect rough treatment from our colleagues whenever we produce something shoddy. The knowledge that quality counts makes even routine tasks rewarding.

And of course it’s true, Dear, that you will find pleasure (viz., survival signals) if you become more aware, gain more control over your environment, and do “quality work”. Therefore, someday when you have the time, do take apart – and put back together! – your old (!) computer and your (old!) TV set. Similarly, do your best to have “quality interactions” with all your acquaintances.

But I concluded that such authors failed to adequately convey a critical point: quality interactions, yes, but *as time permits!* As you’ve undoubtedly already found, Dear, a root cause (if not *the* root cause) of alienation from our environment and of unsatisfying, superficial interactions with people is not from complexities, our lack of interest or desire, our limited intelligence or empathy, or similar, but simply a matter of time. You could learn all

there is to know about door knobs, microprocessors, or quantum electrodynamics, for example, but then, when would you have the time to do your homework, play the piano and soccer, help your parents, “hang-out” with your friends, be with a certain special someone, and (as an example that may really bring your priorities into question) spend time reading your weird old grandfather’s silly book?

This “time crunch” usually hurts us most when it constrains and compresses interpersonal relations. For example, I’m sure that you would have wished that your parents would have spent more time with you, Dear, but someday you’ll probably see how much time your father was forced to spend on his job – and probably you already know the many demands on your mother’s time. You might have desired better interactions even with your grandparents, but that’s one of the disadvantages of the mobility of modern society. Now and in the future, you’ll similarly be dissatisfied with the time you can spend with your acquaintances, friends, and even (if appropriate) your spouse. And I’m sorry to say, Dear, that I know of no solution to this problem, save the wisdom of the Seven Sages “Nothing too much”, the realization *Quality – as much as time permits*, and the wisdom in the modern idea stated, for example, as: “You can’t find time; you gotta make it”.

Thus, Dear, once again, you must make decisions – in this case, how to spend your limited time. In making your decisions, in choosing how much quality to develop in specific interactions, in setting your priorities for how to invest your limited time, please keep in mind the following three questions: 1) What are your objectives? (Aren’t your prime goals your trio of survival goals?), 2) What’s most important for you to understand? (Isn’t it yourself?), and 3) Given your background, training, and experiences, how much time should you spend on religion? (That is, how much of your precious time should you spend on multi-thousand-year-old silly “explanations” for, for example, why the wind blows, what this universe “is”, and how we’re “supposed to” live our lives?)

As responses to this third question (about how much time to spend on religion), let me just list some quotations that you can find assembled in Wayne Aiken’s tremendous collection<sup>1</sup> – whose efforts freed up so much time for the rest of us!

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<sup>1</sup> At <http://htomc.dns2go.com/atheism/cookie.41a> and <http://htomc.dns2go.com/atheism/cookie.41b>.

When [one] is freed of religion, [one] has a better chance to live a normal and wholesome life. (Sigmund Freud)

The most fatal blow to progress is slavery of the intellect. (Helen Gardner)

The persistence of erroneous beliefs exacerbates the widespread anachronistic failure to recognize the urgent problems that face humanity on this planet. (Murray Gell-Mann)

Scientific education and religious education are incompatible. The clergy have ceased to interfere with education at the advanced state, with which I am directly concerned, but they have still got control of that of children. This means that the children have to learn about Adam and Noah instead of about Evolution; about David who killed Goliath, instead of Koch who killed cholera; about Christ's ascent into heaven instead of Montgolfier's and Wright's. Worse than that, they are taught that it is a virtue to accept statements without adequate evidence, which leaves them a prey to quacks of every kind in later life, and makes it very difficult for them to accept the methods of thought which are successful in science. (J.B.S. Haldane)

Credulity is not a crime for the individual, but it is clearly a crime as regards the race. Just look at the actual consequences of credulity. For years men believed in the foul superstition of witchcraft – and many poor people suffered for this foolish belief. There was a general belief in angels and demons, flying familiarly, yet skittishly through the air – and that belief caused untold distress and pain and tragedy. The most holy Catholic church (and, after it, the various Protestant sects) enforced the dogma that heresy was terribly sinful and punishable by death – imagine (but all you need do is to recount) the suffering entailed by that belief. When one surveys the causes and consequences of credulity, it is apparent that this easy [belief] in the impossible, this readiness toward false and fanatical notions, has been indeed a most serious and major crime against humanity. The social life in any age, it may be said, is about what its extent of credulity guarantees. In an extremely credulous age, social life will be cruel and dark and treacherous; in a skeptical age, social life will be more humane. (E. Haldeman-Julius)

For ages, a deadly conflict has been waged between a few brave men and women of thought and genius upon the one side, and the great ignorant religious mass on the other. This is the war between Science and Faith. The few have appealed to reason, to honor, to law, to freedom, to the known, and to happiness here in this world. The many have appealed to prejudice, to fear, to miracle, to slavery, to the unknown, and to misery hereafter. The few have said, "Think!" The many have said, "Believe!" (Robert G. Ingersoll)

There is in every village a torch – the teacher; and an extinguisher – the clergyman. (Victor Hugo)

Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration: courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness, and above all, love of the truth. (H.L. Mencken)

Men become civilized not in proportion to their willingness to believe but in proportion to their readiness to doubt. (H.L. Mencken)

The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently. (Nietzsche)

If you must believe in anything, believe in yourselves, in your senses and in your minds. To accept a religious creed is to accept another's mind in place of your own, and generally contrary to your own. When religious belief comes in brains go out. Man has asked for the truth and the Church has given him miracles. He has asked for knowledge, and the Church has given him theology. He has asked for facts, and the Church has given him the Bible. This foolishness should stop. The Church has nothing to give man that has not been in cold storage for two thousand years. Anything would become stale in that time. (Marilla M. Ricker)

We should be teaching our children the scientific method and the Bill of Rights. (Carl Sagan & Ann Druyan)

The tragedy is that every brain cell devoted to belief in the supernatural is a brain cell one cannot use to make life richer or easier or happier. (Kay Nolte Smith)

I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster. (Henry David Thoreau)

Freethinkers are those who are willing to use their minds without prejudice and without fearing to understand things that clash with their own customs, privileges, or beliefs. (Leo Tolstoy)

Loyalty to a petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul. (Mark Twain)

Whatever tends to prolong the existence of ignorance or to prevent the recognition of knowledge is dangerous to the well-being of the human race... A dogma is the hand of the dead on the throat of the living... An organization that requires the suppression of facts and the discouragement of knowledge, in order to maintain its supremacy, is the relic of a tyranny which our free age and our free thought are in duty bound to remove from the earth. (Lemuel K. Washburn)

If the above quotations have raised questions in your mind, Dear, then good! I'll try to answer some of your questions as I proceed through the remainder of this book. As a summary of what I'll try to show you, let me state my strongly felt opinion: for the remainder of your life, Dear, I hope that the only time that you invest in "the god idea" is whatever time it takes to purge

this silliness from your mind – and then, should you so decide, the time you devote to ridding humanity of the disease known as religion.

But let me delay until later chapters my attempts to explain that summary statement and now return to the rest of what I review with “Q”, which includes the reminder about quotations: *The quotes from Emerson and Churchill notwithstanding, do read Bartlett’s again – in spite of its biases and misrepresentations.* To explain what this means to me, I’d better back up a bit.

Already in this book, a number of times, I’ve quoted the New England poet, author, and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), including his “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds...” and “one man’s justice is another’s injustice...” In a future chapter, I’ll use his “thoughts rule the world”. Obviously, therefore, many times I agree with Emerson, but here let me quote one of his thoughts with which I disagree: “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.”

For reason to be described, I disagree with Emerson’s suggestion that, by quoting someone else, people don’t reveal what they know (or, at least, what they think they know) – as well as revealing much more. In fact, it’s relatively easy to argue that also Emerson disagreed with Emerson! Thus, in his *Quotations and Originality* he wrote “Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it” and “By necessity, by proclivity [i.e., ‘by inclination, especially toward something discreditable’], and by delight, we all quote.” Yet, if you then conclude that Emerson was inconsistent, let me complete what I only partially quoted above.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do...  
Speak what you think today in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today.

But whether or not you agree that Emerson was inconsistent, let me focus on his statement: “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.” Although it seems inappropriate to comment on what Emerson liked or disliked and although it’s understandable that he desired to be exposed to original thoughts, I really dislike his implication (or maybe it’s just my inference), first, that what a person quotes doesn’t reveal what the person knows (or assumes is known) – and considers important.

For example, when I hear someone quoting the founding fathers of this country, then I gain some idea of the person's sense of at least American history; when I hear someone quoting various philosophers, then I gain an impression of a person struggling to understand; when I hear someone frequently quoting different ideas from Shakespeare, then I gain some idea about that person's background and experiences; when I hear someone quoting various Ancient Greek authors, I admire that person's depth of awareness; and when I hear someone frequently quoting some "holy book" (or "scripture"), I learn something about the rut in which that person's mind is stuck. Thus, in contrast to Emerson, I conclude, first, that whom and what a person quotes tells me much about what the person considers important.

Second, this dual statement of Emerson's ("I hate quotations. Tell me what you know") leaves me with the taste of a double-dose of arrogance. One dose is from the hint that Emerson thinks he's aware of all ideas ever expressed – as if he hates quotations, because he's already heard and considered them all. That possibility seems extremely remote, even for Emerson. And even if it were so, then maybe he should have reconsidered some of these quotations, such as "moderation in all things". And the other "dose of arrogance" detected is from his demand, "Tell me what you know." Such a demand may be appropriate when a teacher examines a student, but if someone should make such a demand of me, I would have a strong tendency to respond: "Well, I have developed a new method to detect arrogance, but I have decided to share my idea only with friends."

Consequently, Dear, my view is quite different from Emerson's "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know." Although only in exceptional cases would I go so far as to say I love quotations (e.g., I love Voltaire's summary "If people believe in absurdities, they will commit atrocities" – which I would like to hear repeatedly quoted until the plague of religion is purged from the Earth), yet in general, I'm extremely pleased if a writer or speaker quotes others (in moderation). In contrast to Emerson's suggestion that quoting others doesn't reveal what you know, I think that when you quote others, you reveal not only what you know (or at least what you assume you know) but also that you've considered the thoughts of others, that you acknowledge their struggling and achievements, that you're participating in humanity's collective consciousness, and that you don't arrogantly claim to be able to express ideas more competently.

I get a similar impression of arrogance from Winston Churchill's assessment:

It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations. Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* is an admirable work, and I studied it intently. The quotations when engraved upon the memory give you good thoughts. They also make you anxious to read the authors and look for more.

What bothers me about this statement is not only Churchill's suggestion that quotations from Bartlett's "give you good thoughts" (for, as I've just finished trying to demonstrate with one of Emerson's statements, Bartlett's can also provide some pretty bad thoughts!) but also Churchill's implication (or, again, maybe its only my inference) that reading "books of quotations" is for the "uneducated".

As with the quote from Emerson, this quote from Churchill also leaves me with the impression of arrogance (common among the aristocracy). In fact, this time it leaves me with the taste of a triple-dose of arrogance – although I admit that he managed to diminish one of these doses by adding that he studied Bartlett's "intently", from which it would seem to follow that he admitted that he was among the ranks of the "uneducated".

One detected "dose of arrogance" is from the implication that one becomes educated by reading books. In contrast, I remember (but poorly) the story about the student who went to the Zen master and asked for the "secret of enlightenment". The master inquired: "Have you done all your chores?" The student answered: "Yes master". In response to which the Zen master provided the guidance: "Good. Then go and help with the dishes."

But beyond the arrogance of failing to recognize that valuable education is available from working and from helping others (even if you never read a book), the second "dose of arrogance" that I detect in Churchill's statement (an arrogance common among aristocrats) is the hint that "education" is gained from reading "the classics" (i.e., reading authors who are frequently quoted). In contrast, although Churchill (as an example) might have read all "the classics", almost certainly he knew nothing about nuclear physics – until some "uneducated" physicist finally was able to confront him with the facts about Germany's ambitions to build a nuclear bomb. Then, I wonder, who considered whom "uneducated"!

And the third “dose of arrogance” that I detect in Churchill’s statement (again common among aristocrats) is a lack of appreciation that we among “the uneducated masses” are almost always pressed for time. And whereas, Dear, almost certainly you, too, will be too busy earning a living, raising a family, etc., to devote time to “read the authors and look for more” (unless you win the lottery or in some other manner join the ranks of the aristocracy – or until you retire!), then I encourage you to make efficient use of your limited time by reading books of quotations, such as Bartlett’s. In fact, Dear, I would encourage you to read Bartlett’s (or a similar book of quotations), in its entirety, every ten years or so. I have done so, and plan to continue, which is what I remind myself with: *The quotes from Emerson and Churchill notwithstanding, do read Bartlett’s again...*

And in case my suggestion to you seems strange, to read and then (a decade-or-so later) to re-read Bartlett’s (or a similar book of quotations), let me add some explanation. Dear: if I were asked to summarize the most significant experience in my life, I would have a tendency to respond: “changing outlooks.” Of course I can identify some goals and views that have changed relatively little (e.g., my desire to survive!), but it’s amazing to me how my childish desire to “catch up” to my brothers gave way to my teenage desires to catch various girls, my 20’s goal to acquire knowledge gave way to my 30’s goal to meet the financial responsibilities of my family, my 40’s need to repair my family gave way to my 50’s need to at last be free, and now there are my 60’s goal to try to help the children of the world (specifically, to help certain grandchildren) break free from the tyranny of religion.

Simultaneously, like a tree adding a new ring each year, each decade-or-so my interests expanded to encircle additional people: from my childhood family, to my friends at school, to the people of my studies, to fellow employees, to my local community, to a community of scientists throughout the world who were doing similar work, and then to all people of the world, especially the children. Meanwhile, during at least the past 40 years, I’ve found that every time I re-read Bartlett’s, not only did I rediscover ideas I wanted to reinforce, I discovered ideas I had not appreciated in earlier readings. Therefore, Dear, my suggestion to you (and to myself): re-read Bartlett’s every decade-or-so.

But also let me add a caution, Dear, to encourage you to explore beyond the quotations included in Bartlett’s. Over the years, I’ve become progressively more disappointed with Bartlett’s, because of its biases and

misrepresentations. For example, I've gained the definite impression that whoever selected the quotations for Bartlett's applied a filter that selectively included praise of religion and selectively excluded praise of humanism.

I should immediately add, however, that I don't know if this "selective filtering" represents a deliberate distortion by the editors of Bartlett's or if it could be (or was) justified, for example, by objectively assessing the number of times specific ideas have been quoted. But even if the latter is the case, then it's easy to see that our culture introduces biases and thereby can misrepresent opinions of the original authors. Thus, especially in the past, our culture has (courtesy the clerics) displayed what I consider to be an extremely unhealthy bias in favor of religion (and against the horrible "atheists" and "secular humanists"). Here, I won't be able to justify my claim of Bartlett's misrepresentations and biases (for if the task were done well, it could fill a book or more!), but let me at least give you a few examples, even for the case of just the founders of this country.

Thus, Dear, if you would read the quotations in Bartlett's attributed to Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams, and even Abraham Lincoln (who of course lived almost a century later than the others, but he should also be identified as one of this country's "founders"), I expect that you'll gain the impression that they all were good "god-fearing Christians". In contrast, from the quotations below (also taken from Aiken's collection, referenced earlier in this chapter), you can see that, in fact, all of them had rejected Christianity for what is called Deism (meaning, in essence, belief in the existence of some "supreme being" but rejection of all religions claimed to be revealed to various self-proclaimed "profits", such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Joseph Smith).

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church [i.e., Islam], by the Protestant Church, nor by any Church that I know of. My own mind is my own Church... As to the book called the Bible, it is blasphemy to call it the Word of God. It is a book of lies and contradictions and a history of bad times and bad men. (Thomas Paine)

My parents had early given me religious impressions, and brought me through my childhood piously in the dissenting [puritan] way. But I was scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's lectures. [Robert Boyle (1627-1691) was a British physicist who endowed the Boyle Lectures for defense of Christianity.] It happened that they wrought an effect on me

quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough deist.” (Benjamin Franklin)

I never told my religion nor scrutinized that of another. I never attempted to make a convert nor wished to change another's creed. I have judged of others' religion by their lives, for it is from our lives and not from our words that our religion must be read. By the same test must the world judge me. (Thomas Jefferson)<sup>2</sup>

If they are good workmen, they may be from Asia, Africa or Europe; they may be Mahometans [Muslims], Jews, Christians of any sect, or they may be Atheists... (George Washington)

In 1793 Washington thus summarized the religious philosophy he was evolving during his Mount Vernon years. How happenings would “terminate is known only to the great ruler of events; and confiding in his wisdom and goodness, we may safely trust the issue to him, without perplexing ourselves to seek for that which is beyond human ken, only taking care to perform the parts assigned to us in a way that reason and our own conscience approve of.” George Washington was, like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, a deist. (*The Forge of Experience*, Volume one of James Thomas Flexner's four volume biography of Washington; Little, Brown & Company; pp. 244-245)

This is my religion... joy and exaltation in my own existence... (John Adams)

The United States of America have exhibited, perhaps, the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature; and if men are now sufficiently enlightened to disabuse themselves of artifice, imposture, hypocrisy, and superstition, they will consider this event as an era in their history. Although the detail of the formation of the American governments is at present little known or regarded either in Europe or in America, it may hereafter become an object of curiosity. It will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the influence of Heaven, more than those at work upon ships or houses, or laboring in merchandise or agriculture; it

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<sup>2</sup> Dear: As you can find in the book *Jefferson Himself* by Bernard Mayo (University Press of Virginia, 1942), in a letter to John Adams dated 11 Jan. 1817, Jefferson wrote: “Say nothing of my religion. It is known to my God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life; if that has been *honest and dutiful* to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.” In a letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse dated 26 June 1822, Jefferson wrote, “I trust that there is not a *young man* now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian”, and in a letter to the same recipient dated 8 Jan. 1825, Jefferson wrote, “The population of my neighborhood is too slender, and is too much divided into other sects to maintain any one preacher [of Unitarianism] well. I must therefore be contented to be a Unitarian by myself.” And in a letter to his nephew Peter Carr, Jefferson wrote: “The Christian god can be easily pictured as virtually the same as the many ancient gods of past civilizations. The Christian god is a three-headed monster: cruel, vengeful, and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of the people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes: fools and hypocrites.”

will forever be acknowledged that these governments were contrived merely by the use of reason and the senses... (John Adams)

The Bible is not my Book and Christianity is not my religion. I could never give assent to the long complicated statements of Christian dogma. (Abraham Lincoln)

And in case you've concluded, Dear, that all of the above has been more of your old grandfather's rambling, then let me try to summarize some of the points that I've been trying to illustrate and want to make. I encourage you to read (and reread) what others have said, and if appropriate, to quote them (in moderation), but don't accept the ideas of other people (even an Emerson or a Churchill – or even a certain grandfather!) without evaluating the ideas yourself. Also, please be careful not to judge a person by a few statements that the person has made, not only because these statements may misrepresent the person's opinion (which, in turn, may change) but also (and more significantly) because you should judge people most not by what they say but by what they do.

And if you were able to keep up on with me on the trail, Dear, then you might notice what we managed to do: we made it to the dam! That is, returning to the analogy for this Part 3 of this book (from **J** to **Q**), I've been pretending that we've walking along one of "my southern trails", between the river and the mountains, up to the dam (used to divert water into the irrigation ditch). As you know, upon reaching the dam I usually take a break from walking. If I'm alone, I look at things and think a bit; when you were with me, we'd usually chat a bit, about things and thoughts. Here, let me chat a bit about some general features of two "excursions", **Qx** and **Yx**, that you might want to take.

**Qx** is an "excursion" through the "Quagmire of 'Revealed' Religions". Like the excursion that my two oldest grandchildren took out onto the riverbed above the dam, **Qx** is tough slogging, through the mud and guck of our culture's principal "holy books" (including the books claimed to be "holy" by the religion in which you've been indoctrinated). My goal for **Qx** is to show you more details of the "sad personal policies and sick social policies" advocated in these books. And I should warn you that **Qx** will take you longer to read than it already appears, because I ask you to read the "holy books" also.

My goal for **Yx**, dealing with "Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie", is to try to show you some of the historical origins of at least some of

the policies advocated in these “holy books”. And I should warn you that, in some ways, **Yx** is even tougher “slogging” than **Qx**. Certainly it was tougher for me to blaze the trail, mostly because I spent my “working life” in studying science not history. To provide you with a better experience on this excursion, I’ll be encouraging you to read a dozen or so other books by competent historians.

Yet, beyond those warnings of difficulties and of my incompetences, let me warn you about something else, appropriate for both **Qx** and **Yx**. In an earlier chapter, I stated that I wanted to postpone describing some of the stupidities and immoralities promoted by all organized religions, because they “get my anger juices flowing”. Thus my warning: whereas in earlier chapters I’ve tried to be kind to the foolish people who promote their gods (believe it or not!), yet in what follows, I’ll be “taking my gloves off”. I’m sorry about that, Dear, but this book is already hard enough to write, without my simultaneously trying to suppress my emotions.

If you think something similar to “it’s a pity that you can’t present your opinions unemotionally”, maybe I would agree with you. But as I’ve already said, I don’t even want to try, because the task would be such a strain. Besides, Dear, let me show you an example of someone, far more competent and important than I, who similarly couldn’t control his anger at similar stupidity and immorality.

And of course your response to that last sentence may be something similar to “Just because someone else does something wrong, doesn’t mean that it’s okay for you to do it!” If so, then after remarking how amazingly similar you sound to my daughter, my wife, and my mother (!), I’d agree with you – but wouldn’t agree to change my plan!

To which you might respond with something similar to: “That’s sad. Why don’t you model your behavior after someone good, like Moses or Jesus or Muhammad or Joseph Smith?” If so, Dear, then first I’d warn you to be careful, because you just put yourself in the middle of a patch surrounded by quicksand: as I’ll be showing you, you just finished listing a group of horrible hypocrites. And second, Dear, I’d say “Tough!” That is, Dear, there’s a limit to how much balderdash an old fogey can take, and the junk in the “holy books” of our culture surpasses my limit. If you want to write civilized, polite, objective analyses of these “holy books”, then be my guest.

At most, I only have a few years left, and I ain't gonna waste my precious time pussy-footin' around a bunch of ignorant clerics. So there!

Anyway, Dear, the person I have in mind (who also refused to control his temper) is the one to whom, almost certainly, you and all Americans (and maybe all humans) are most indebted for their freedoms, namely, Thomas Jefferson. Among his many accomplishments was to write the Declaration of Independence, with its indelible phrase:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator<sup>3</sup> with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...

In a later "excursion", **Ux**, I'll show you some of the many people to whom, in turn, Jefferson was indebted for his ideas (and, therefore, we are indebted for our freedoms), but for now, let me gloss over this history and just ask you to keep in mind the greatness of Thomas Jefferson and his capabilities as a writer.

Yet, Dear, now let me show you something else that Thomas Jefferson wrote. In a letter written when he was 71 to his friend John Adams (this country's first vice president and second president), Jefferson states:<sup>4</sup>

Having more leisure... for reading, I amused myself with reading seriously Plato's *Republic*. I am wrong, however, in calling it amusement, for it was the heaviest task-work I ever went through. I had occasionally before taken up some of his other works, but scarcely ever had patience to go through a whole dialogue. While wading through the whimsies, the puerilities, and unintelligible jargon of this work, I laid it down often to ask myself how it could have been that the world should have so long consented to give reputation to such nonsense as this?

Now, Dear, before I continue with my demonstration of Jefferson's anger at the clerics, let me show you an example from Plato, that would stimulate Jefferson to describe reading Plato as "wading through... whimsies... puerilities... unintelligible jargon... and nonsense" – and many stronger words, which I'll show you soon.

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<sup>3</sup> Dear: "their creator" should be understood to mean "nature" (which created all of us!), because as I tried to show you, Thomas Jefferson was a deist (as were Ethan Allen, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and probably George Washington). These days, a "deist" would be called a "secular humanist" – which is what your old grandfather would be pleased to be called (while preferring "scientific humanist").

<sup>4</sup> Copied from *Jefferson Himself* by Bernard Mayo, University Press of Virginia, 1970, p. 300.

As I mentioned in the “excursion” **Ix** and will show you more in **Ux**, Plato (c. 428-348 BCE) was Socrates’ student (or at least his protégé) and Aristotle’s teacher. If you will read even just a bit of the huge amount of material that Plato wrote, I think that you’ll agree that, as a student, he failed to surpass his teacher (Socrates), and as a teacher, what a boon to humanity that his student (Aristotle) enormously outshone his teacher! A central feature of all of Plato’s ideas is his “world of *ideai*” (Greek for ‘ideas’) or his “world of *eide*” (from which the English word ‘idol’ is derived) – also called Plato’s “theory of forms”.

Unfortunately, though, it’s hard to find a concise summary of Plato’s theory of forms – probably because Plato apparently never wrote anything concisely! In particular, in his *Republic* (which Jefferson was writing to Adams about), Plato pretends that Socrates is discussing various ideas with a variety of other people (which are the “dialogues” that Jefferson mentioned). Therefore, to show you what Plato meant by his “theory of forms”, let me show you a few pieces from one of his “dialogues”.

First... let me remind you of the distinction... between [on the one hand] the multiplicity of things that we call good or beautiful or whatever it may be and, on the other hand, Goodness itself or Beauty itself and so on. Corresponding to each of these sets of many things, we postulate a single Form or Real Essence, as we call it.

With this, Plato is proposing that, because there are a number of cases of, e.g., “good” (e.g., you are “good” with the kids, “good” in math, “good” when you think for yourself, etc.), therefore (according to Plato) there is such a “thing” as Good (with a capital “G”, no less!), which has the property (unsurprisingly!) of “Goodness”.

And yes, Dear, I agree that there are such ideas as “good” and “goodness” (though obviously these are very subjective, in turn because “goodness” is to be measured with respect to some objective), but hang on for a minute, because Plato will propose that this “Good” actually “exists” – and even more – that the “Good” is what “believers” now call “God”.

It [Goodness] is the cause of knowledge and truth. And so, while you may think of it as an object of knowledge, you will do well to regard it as something beyond truth and knowledge and, precious as these both are, of still higher worth... [Objects of knowledge] derive from the Good not only their power of being known, but their very being and reality; and Goodness is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power.

If you're scratching your head at the above quotation from Plato, Dear, then I say "good"! Plato's thoughts yield concepts that philosophers call *quale* [plural, *qualia*], meaning "a quantity, as whiteness, loudness, etc., abstracted as an independent, universal essence from a thing", which means – pure gobbledygook!

Dear: Just as in all religions, Plato bandies words around as if they no longer need meaning. He says, "[Goodness] is the cause of knowledge", but those of us who still live on planet Earth would say: "It's good to know stuff" (because it promotes our trio of survival goals). He also says that "[Goodness] is the cause of... truth", but the rest of us would say something similar to "The truth is usually good" (because it promotes our trio of survival goals). As for his "Goodness" [is] beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power", those of us still on planet Earth wonder: "How is 'beyond being' more 'dignified'? What does this 'dignified' mean? What 'power' exists 'beyond being'? What does this 'power' mean? What does 'beyond being' mean?!"

Of course it's easy to imagine how one person's mind can "go around the bend" as badly as Plato's, but what amazes me is that so many people (over so many centuries) followed him around the same bend! The source of his leaps over logic seems to be simply his use of a capital letter. Thus, what he does, first, is play some grammatical games, starting with a perfectly good adjective (similar to "red", as in "the red barn"). Next, he turns the adjective into a noun (as in "the barn's redness is fading"). Then, he uses it as a subject – complete with a capital letter ("Yet, the Redness persists!"). Once he has the capital letter, he then gives this "noun" any attribute he desires: "For this Redness is the best of colors: the color of the most beautiful roses and sunsets, the color that transmits heat throughout the universe, the color that gives power to blood, and therefore – as must be obvious to all – Redness is the supreme color, chosen by the gods themselves"!

Well, fun and games, but so what? Well, Dear, as I'll show you soon, he then takes a hideous step, which in this case would be: "Anyone who does not recognize Red to be the supreme color should learn the truth by having his head chopped off!" Thus, Dear, although it's essentially impossible to show you details without quoting pages and pages of rambling "dialogue", Plato next goes through a huge set of leaps past logic to "demonstrate" (or, actually, to copy from Pythagoras – who in turn seems to have copied the

idea from Persian priests such as Zoroaster, who in turn may have copied the idea from Egyptian or Indian priests!) that humans have “souls” that “existed before we were born” (because we know these “ideal forms” without ever experiencing them while we’ve been alive) and that gods exist:

So now there is no longer any difficulty in stating expressly that... concerning all the stars and the moon, and concerning the years and months and all seasons, [no] other account [can] be given than this... namely, that, inasmuch as it has been shown they are all caused by one or more souls, which are good also with all goodness, we shall declare these souls to be the gods...

What astounding stupidity!

Dear, please stop to think about the stupidity of Plato’s hypotheses. To be of value (to others besides the con artists and quacks who make and sell such snake oil), all hypotheses must at least: 1) succinctly summarize a substantial amount of reliable data, and 2) be falsifiable (and, of course, if an hypothesis is shown to be false, then it’s to be rejected as “mere speculation”). Please look at how Plato’s hypotheses measure against these two criteria.

First, Plato has argued (in essence) that his hypothesis of the existence of eternal souls (a hypothesis that’s one of the fundamental dogmas of all religions) “summarizes a vast amount of information”. Specifically, he argues that we all know “the Good”, yet have never encountered it, and therefore our “souls” know “the Good” from encounters during previous lifetimes. But does Plato’s hypothesis (and similar hypotheses in Mormonism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism,...) of “an eternal soul” efficiently summarize the data? Instead, what about the simpler hypothesis that we know “the good” because of our abilities to imagine?

Further: is this “soul hypothesis” a “good” summary of the data? How does it account for differences in opinion about what’s “good”: I say that the “ideal” pencil would be between an HB and a B, whereas you say that it would be between H and 2H; I say that the “best” living thing would be a tree (which makes its own food) that could move, while you say that it’s a certain person who...; and I say that the “good” is to think for yourself and base your decisions on data, while all clerics say that the “good” is to obey. With a huge number of such obvious differences in perceptions of “the Good” (differences inconsistent with Plato’s complicated hypothesis of the existence of “eternal souls” and yet totally consistent with the simple and

obvious hypothesis that humans have powers of imagination), surely this would lead sane humans to reject Plato's hypothesis (and similar hypotheses by Mormons, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus) about the existence of "eternal souls".

But further, Plato's hypothesis (and similar hypotheses of all organized religions) of the existence of "eternal souls" should be rejected as useless because it fails to pass the second obvious test for any hypothesis to be of any value: is the hypothesis falsifiable? Dear: if you can devise a method to test this hypothesis (besides the "pat answer": you'll know when you die – which is a nonsensical test for living humans), then please let the world know! You will be acclaimed as the most brilliant human who ever lived, for try as the rest of us have, no one has yet conceived a method to test the hypothesis of the existence of "eternal souls". Therefore, all thinking humans reject his hypothesis as mere musings of minds unconstrained by data.

And the same type of analysis devastates Plato's second hypothesis (and the similar hypotheses of all organized religions) that the souls of the gods control the seasons and the motions of the planets. This hypothesis 1) does not efficiently summarize the information, and 2) is not falsifiable – unless, Dear, you can show us a way to test the souls of the gods! In contrast, 1) much more efficient summaries of the information are the hypotheses that the seasons are controlled by the motion about the Sun of a titled Earth and that the motions of the planets are controlled by gravity, and 2) these hypotheses about the titled Earth and about gravity are falsifiable (and, who knows, may yet be shown to be false, although they certainly have already passed a huge number of tests without yet being falsified).

"So what?" wonders the grandchild. Dear: I encourage you to study history (some of which I'll show you in **Ux** dealing with "Uncovering Understanding") to learn what a huge influence Plato's stupidity has had on "Western" culture (and actually, on Islam, as well). Here, let me give you just a brief illustration, which suggests (realistically) that Plato's nonsense is at the basis of Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism. This quotation (in which I've changed the spelling of 'premise' to 'premiss') is from an article entitle "God Is Dead: What Next? A Buddhist Response to Nietzsche" by Robert Morrison (aka Dharmachari Sagaramati):<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The full article is available at [http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/voll/god\\_is\\_dead.html](http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/voll/god_is_dead.html).

Yet, to Nietzsche, this demise of “God”, this loss of belief in all that we esteemed as the highest and most valuable, is simply the natural and logical outcome, within the history of Western culture, of the accepted religious and metaphysical world-view. It all begins with the original premiss of the framework of Platonism, which, according to Nietzsche, became the ground of all subsequent metaphysical, religious, moral, historical and political views on man and his place in the universe.

Broadly, that original Platonic or Socratic premiss claimed that existence is bifurcated into two separate asymmetrical realms, one transitory, mundane and of the nature of an “appearance”; the other the eternally divine and “True Reality”. It was the latter, this “True Reality”, that gave life its meaning and value and man his orientation within it, as well as the capacity, through the “intellect [nous] which is the pilot of the soul”, to discern it. The former, the natural world, was, by contrast, valueless and without any inherent meaning except, perhaps, as a means of weakly reflecting that “True Reality” and reminding the philosopher of its presence.

Within this two-world view, the only truly human life was one lived in pursuit of that eternal reality, was one whose goal was to gain knowledge of, to commune with (and even enter, at death) that “True Reality”. Our “true home” was in that other divine realm. Within this two-world framework, the highest human values, whether religious, moral, aesthetic or otherwise, those which give life meaning and value, had their source not in this natural world but in that other realm or being that transcends this natural world. In comparison with that eternal, transcendent realm or being, the source of all that is called “good”, this transitory and mundane world is valueless and meaningless, even “evil”. As a consequence of this two-world view, all passions, aspirations and goals whose objects and ends are in this natural world are also, by definition, valueless and meaningless – even “evil”. As such, they are to be resisted and conquered by the “good” man.

In the West, this Platonic world-view provided the theological framework for Christianity. As Augustine tells us, “Christianity is Platonism for the people”. Plato’s “True World” becomes Christianized as the “Kingdom of God”, which is now accessible to more than philosophers as one can enter it by faith alone. However, the object of faith can only be verified at death – what is called “eschatological verification”. [aka stupidity!]

But, Dear, even more significant than Plato’s stupidity is the evil to which his stupidity has led humanity. For example, in the following quotation, please consider the evil that Plato stimulated. The following, by Plato, is quoted from the *History of Western Philosophy* by W.T. Jones (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1952) with editorial comments {in brackets such as these} as given by Jones, plus some notes that I’ve added [as per usual, in braces such as these].

If anyone commits impiety [i.e., acts not showing due reverence to Plato's hypothesized gods] either by word or deed, he that meets with him shall defend the law by informing the magistrates {i.e., it is the duty of every citizen to be an informer}. And if a man be convicted, the court shall assess one penalty for each separate act of impiety. Imprisonment shall be imposed in every case. {Atheists} who suffer from folly [or ignorance] being devoid of evil disposition and character, shall be placed... in {a} reformatory for a period of not less than five years, during which time no other of the citizens shall hold intercourse with them, save only those... who shall accompany them to minister to their souls' salvation by admonition [not less than five years in prison for not believing in "the gods" – and during these five years, indoctrination!]; and when the period of their incarceration has expired, if any of them seems to be reformed, he shall dwell with those who are reformed, but if not, and if he be convicted again on a like charge, he shall be punished by death. But as to {that second class of atheists}, [who had the "evil disposition and character" to think for themselves]... if any of these men be pronounced guilty, the court shall order him to be imprisoned... in the wildest and loneliest place possible, and shall order that no free man shall approach such criminals at any time... And he that dies shall be cast outside the borders without burial... [i.e., not only life imprisonment for humans who dare to think for themselves, but also, no burial]."

I hope, Dear, that you shake your head, almost in disbelief that such stupidity could have existed. And yet, this stupidity still exists, and coupled with power, leads to the evils of all organized religions.

To illustrate, let me use Jefferson's words (from the same letter to John Adams as quoted above and to which I've added the italics):

In truth, he [Plato] is one of the race of genuine sophists,<sup>6</sup> who has escaped the oblivion of his brethren, first by the elegance of his diction, but chiefly by the adoption and incorporation of his whimsies into the body of... Christianity. His foggy mind is forever presenting the semblances of objects which, half seen through a mist, can be defined neither in form nor dimensions. Yet this, which should have

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<sup>6</sup> Dear: Historians might quibble with Jefferson's description of Plato as a "sophist", especially because Plato proposed such hideous policies as imprisoning those people who didn't believe in his god – and then killing those who wouldn't be reformed. In contrast, the Sophists proposed little. They were a group of teachers and philosophers (such as Protagoras) who Jones describes (in his book *A History of Western Philosophy*) as follows: "The Sophists said that they taught 'virtue,' but the virtue that they taught was the technique of success in a fifth-century [BCE] democracy. 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' was the substance of their morality. Beyond this, it is impossible to generalize about the Sophistic curriculum... [While] the Sophists did not form a closely-knit group teaching a common doctrine, they were united by a common hostility toward the traditional beliefs of their compatriots. The Sophists felt themselves to be 'enlightened.' By this they meant that they had liberated themselves from the chains of superstition and ignorance that still bound less fortunate men, and that they would be glad – for a price – to set others free... Though they certainly performed a useful social function in sweeping away the cobwebs of superstition, they had nothing positive to put in the place left vacant by the disappearance of mythology... They are important not only because they hastened the end of an era [dominated by mysticism] by spreading skepticism and relativism, but because their views... are 'signs of the times'."

consigned him to early oblivion, really procured him immortality of fame and reverence. *The Christian priesthood... saw in the mysticism of Plato materials with which they might build up an artificial system which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order, and introduce it to profit, power, and pre-eminence...*

Dear, please notice: the above are not the words from your cynical old grandfather, who has trouble controlling his emotions, but the words from President Jefferson – the author of the Declaration of Independence, and the one who, probably more than any other, is the source of your freedoms. If even Jefferson couldn't restrain his anger at such stupidity (and its resulting evil), then as I've already warned you, I ain't gonna even try!

Further, Dear, please don't think that such stupid ideas were constrained to Plato. To illustrate, consider the following quote from "Saint" Augustine (354-430), again quoted from Jones, who in turn quotes Augustine – and consider how Augustine ("the first great Christian philosopher") thereby contributed to the start of the Dark Ages:

While this policy {against a different religious sect} may seem cruel to us, as it doubtless did to those who suffered under it, Augustine argued that it was really most humane. Though "the pagans may indeed... reproach us for the law... enacted against them," they ought to thank us, since "many of them have thereby been and now are daily turned from idols to the living and true God." In this way the basis was laid and authority provided for the institution of the Inquisition, for the co-operation of Church and state in the holy work of extirpating heresy and dissent and of saving souls against their wills.

And thus, Dear, more than a thousand years later and as only one of millions of examples, Galileo was tortured by Church officials, because he had the audacity to trust his own rational analysis of his own data rather than rely on the clerics to do his thinking.

In particular, as a poignant illustration of the fervor with which religious people can cling to their nonsense, consider the following letter from a Professor of Philosophy at Padua University (where Galileo taught), disputing Galileo's observations of moons around Jupiter (which Galileo had seen through his newly invented telescope), and declining Galileo's invitation to visit his observatory to view the satellites of Jupiter for himself. Again I have taken this quote from Jones, p. 622, and added some notes in "square brackets":

There are seven windows [wrote this “philosopher”] given to animals in the domicile of the head [that is, two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and a mouth]... From this and many other similarities in nature, such as the seven metals, [which I guess is the number of metals that had been discovered in Galileo’s time], etc., which it were tedious to enumerate, we gather that the number of planets is necessarily seven. Moreover, these [alleged] satellites of Jupiter are invisible to the naked eye, and therefore would be useless, and therefore do not exist. [By that reasoning, atoms, electrons, and so on (being “invisible to the naked eye”) are also “useless, and therefore do not exist”; therefore, Dear, no more television or computers for you! And for that matter, “being invisible to the naked eye”, no more gods – but that reasoning was apparently too much for this philosopher]. Besides, [from the earliest times men] have adopted the division of the week into seven days, and have named them after the seven planets... Now, if we increase the number of planets, this whole and beautiful system falls to the ground.

No wonder Galileo was tortured by agents of the Church until he recanted: his data violated the “sacredness” of the number seven!

Now, Dear, although I’ve given you only the barest outline of a few examples, maybe you already see the horror that can result when the mystics gain control. The hideous junk (to imprison and murder “nonbelievers”), written by the mystical maniac Plato is almost the same as was written about 800 years later by the “first great Christian philosopher” Augustine – which then was used for more than a thousand years to guide the clerics of the Dark Ages in their torturing and murdering humans who had the audacity to think for themselves. Thousands upon thousands of years of horror because some damn mystics “thought” that what they imagined was real!

And, Dear, please don’t think that all this stuff is “ancient history”. As I’ll be showing you, the mystics of the world continue to perpetuate their evils throughout the world, today: from the living hells in the slums in Brazil to the garbage dumps in the Philippines, from the wars in Indonesia to the terror in Iran, from the murders in Iraq and Israel to the genocides in Africa and the Baltics, from the murders in Germany, to the bombings in England and Ireland, and across this country, from the racist murders in Texas and Washington state to the terrorist bombings in Oklahoma City and New York City, to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 – to mention only a few! Yes, Dear, I get mad at the mystics – for the evil that they’ve done and continue to do, against humanity.

Yet, perhaps you would still criticize me for becoming angry. As do my wife and daughter, you might say: “Fine, you’re angry, but control

yourself!” My (now, well-practiced) response is “No!”, and my similarly well-practiced reason is as follows.

First, Dear, I have trouble enough identifying my emotions, without then subjecting myself to the stress and strain of trying to control them inappropriately. In the case of my anger at clerics, my right brain has performed a synthesis of all available data and provided my left brain with its evaluation. In turn, my left brain has taken the time to analyze the reasons form my emotion, and finds these reasons to be sound.

Thus, apparently I become angry at any stupidity, because I perceive it to result in an increased risk to my attaining my trio of survival goals. For example, I become angry with dumb drivers on the highway, because stupid people driving multi-thousand pound vehicles can be a serious threat to my survival (as well as to the survival of other, not-so-dumb humans). Similarly, all clerics, being stupid, are dangerous – not so much to me (although they are, through their parasitic drain on our economy), but to other people, especially young people, and especially certain young people who recognize me as their grandfather and who rightfully expect that I will try to protect them.

Nonetheless (and my anger notwithstanding), perhaps I should use some space to outline a distinction that Jefferson seemed to miss and that I’ll try to observe in the “excursions” **Qx** and **Yx**. What Jefferson (and many other authors) seems to suggest is that all clerics are evil. Instead, I think that he (and others) should have maintained only that all clerics *cause* evil (because of the great harm they cause humans), but that only some of the clerics *are* evil. That is, Dear, I think that a distinction should be made between intent and consequences.

Stated differently, Dear, it seems to me that data support the hypothesis that many clerics don’t *intend* to cause evil; instead, the evil that they cause results from their stupidity. They mean well, but they cause ill. The vast majority of them are probably well meaning but just too stupid or amazingly poorly educated (e.g., many Catholic priests in this country are imported from backward areas in Europe and south of our border).

Yet, in later chapters I’ll provide you with data that support my contention that some people become clerics for the free rides and potential power trips that such positions provide. That is, some clerics are intelligent enough to

realize the evil that they cause – and yet persist. Therefore, Dear, when I can maintain the needed presence of mind, in what follows I'll try to identify the intent of the clerics (of course realizing that it's next to impossible to decipher someone else's intent!), so that I can distinguish between the good vs. evil intent of the clerics – although both intents commonly lead to evil consequences.

But maybe Jefferson was right not to try to make this distinction of intents: maybe all people who cause humanity harm should be classified as stupid. In contrast, some people might describe a Hitler or Stalin or the Pope as intelligent, but when such hideous people have power to force their schemes on other humans, then evil results. One can therefore argue that, no matter how intelligent such people seem to be, because they cause evil, in fact, they must have been (or are) stupid. Thus, maybe Jefferson was right not to try to identify the intent or the intelligence of such people, but judge them only by their deeds – and if the consequences of their deeds is evil (causing humans harm), then maybe Jefferson is right to describe all clerics as evil. But in spite of this argument, I'll try (in what follows) to give some clerics the benefit of the doubt and describe all clerics as just dumb. This would then be consistent with my view that all clerics are just people who willing accept being classified as fools.

Meanwhile, of course all clerics defend their behaviors. In fact, the proponents of the various versions of “the god idea” defend themselves with such rancor (viz., “a continuing and bitter hate or ill will; deep spite or malice”) and intransigency (viz., “refusing to compromise, come to an agreement, or be reconciled”) – up to an including killing “unbelievers” – that it strongly suggests that the leading proponents of the various god ideas (viz., the clerics of the various religions) are promoting their particular versions for their personal benefits rather than for the benefit of the people. In contrast, Dear, I will argue (also with some rancor and intransigency – because the clerics have caused humanity such enormous harm), that humanity will be far better off when all god ideas are dumped into the trash of human mistakes and misunderstandings. As this country's second President, John Adams, wrote: “This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it.”

And with all that said (or at least written), then why recommend that you read our culture's “holy books”? My response (in part) is that such “holy books” are a lot like the strips of flavored rawhide that the vet suggested I

give to my beautiful and well-behaved German shepherd, Heidi, to keep her teeth clean: she uses a lot more energy in chewing, grinding, and devouring them than she gains from digesting them, but they help her “smile”! Similarly, Dear, although you’ll need to invest much more energy and intellect in chewing, grinding, and devouring our culture’s “holy books” than you’ll gain from reading them, yet doing so could materially improve your smile: should people rave to you about the “truth and wisdom” in their “holy book”, you can respond: “Oh, yeah, I remember reading it; it sure is stupid” – and then just smile! Oh, yeah, and then: get some exercise!