

**Oh What a Wonderful World
With Its Lovely Wars and Other Delights**

Prolegomenon

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Prolegomenon

This is a prolegomenon to and for this little book. It needs one to explain, and hopefully justify, *how* it is written and to briefly explain *why* it was written in what is indeed an eccentric way.

For the how: This book is written in a style that would normally, and *perhaps* more than normally, be thought to be unbecoming of a philosopher and out of bounds for philosophy. It is fulsomely ironic, sometimes even sarcastic and sardonic as well. It is bitter and emotive, though not just emotive, for no words to be words can be without any cognitive content, otherwise they would just be sounds. But emotive it is, and deliberately so. This is not the way philosophy is written now and it is not the way to normally write something regarded as philosophical. Going back a little in the past, Mill, Kant, Hegel, Sidgewick, and Dewey certainly did not write in this way. And neither, to go to my contemporaries or near contemporaries, did Moore, Rawls, both Baiers, Nozick, Parfit, Kitcher, and Putnam, at all write in this way.

In the past, however, even such hard-nosed thinkers as Hobbes and Marx did not write in a neutral, non-sardonic, non-emotive tone. Nor did Montaigne back in the fifteenth century. But that is not how we write philosophy anymore. My writing here has a certain Nietzschean tone without a Nietzschean content. But now even philosophers sympathetic to Nietzsche (Walter Kaufman, for example) do not write like Nietzsche or like I do in this little book. That is no longer the thing done in philosophy. And yet I do it here and deliberately. Perhaps this will lead to its dismissal out of hand. Yet perhaps there is a method in my madness? I urge that the thing for my reader to do is to ask, first and foremost, if what I say is false, exaggerated, ideological, nonsensical or even *parti pris*. *Am I not telling it like it is?* And a separate question is to ask if my way of saying it is appropriate and useful to bring out the full force of what I am saying. Or would a calmer, C. D. Broad-like manner have been better? The crucial thing, of course, is whether what I am saying is true or at least on the track of

truth. There is no reason to think that nothing here is warrantably assertable and so a good candidate for being true.

Don't tell me that there is no telling like it is. Sometimes for some things there is a telling it like it is. But I don't get into a Gianni Vattimo nihilism, not even a 'soft nihilism'. However, it is surely appropriate to ask if over the matters I discuss there is anything even close to a telling it like it is. There surely is for some things, but for what I discuss perhaps that is invariably problematic. Perhaps there is no escaping being *parti-pris*. Yet some cases are plainly unproblematic. I think that is so, but, of course, thinking does not make it so. It doesn't even work for Descartes's *cogito* but certainly not here. I try to make a case for its being so or close to being so. Is that a fool's errand?

I wish, and indeed hope, my readers who do not like my tone and, as well as those who do, would ask themselves, however unwelcome my message may be, if what I say is not, perhaps if toned down a bit, on the mark. I would like what I am claiming to be false or at least overstated. But it seems to me, though of course I may very well be mistaken on some detail or another, or even *tout court* (though less likely), that it is not the case that on the whole I am telling it like it is. Or do I deceive myself?

So *why* do I write in this way? In part, indeed in considerable part, it is because I am tortured by a sense of urgency concerning the fate for us as human beings and indeed for the whole animal kingdom. We must substantially change course. We have made our world, that is, many of the actors in it and particularly many of those in power have made it, hideous and brutal. The hideousness and brutality that obtains is pervasive in many places. Human uncaring runs very deep in the practices of our world. Vast swaths of people are so uncared for that they, and even we more fortunate ones, can rightly feel that they live in an uncaring world. Our social structures exemplify that.

I do not mean that people are largely uncaring, but that even with their acts of caring, we are still left with social structures, and in that way a world, which is massively uncaring, particularly for those on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. So many people are simply expendable,

often exploited, and not infrequently glad to have just any kind of job, even a job in a fast food restaurant so that in some meager way they can get on. It is better to be exploited than to starve on the streets. Such workers in the United States typically need food stamps to survive which also provide what in effect are government subsidies for those marvels of free enterprise: McDonald's, Burger King, as well as for Amazon and that glory of glories, Walmart. Moreover, people who rule and run the world—some ten thousand in a world of around seven billion—do not care or do not care enough to do what is necessary to make the lives of those they employ or rule even a little better or perhaps alternatively they deceptively think that there is nothing they can do or that can be done to make the lives of people go better. *Quietistically* they shrug their shoulders and comfort themselves with the sad but exculpatory belief that the poor will always be with us. They deceive themselves into believing that there is no overcoming or even significantly lessening that. It is just the way that reality is, always has been and must continue to be—or so the rationalization goes. Perhaps, very perhaps, the world will never be a rose garden, but we do not have to live in the horror—the pig sty—we do now.

In either case we are left with all kinds of miseries for vast masses of people in our world. It is not much of an exaggeration that materially speaking the 1% lives fine, the top 10% of the 99% live not badly, and 90% of the 99% live a dreadful life, though even there some are worse off than others. Life goes badly for a check-out clerk in a supermarket, but not as badly as it does for an unemployed homeless person. These 40% or so are not, as many conservatives like to believe, happy couch potatoes or welfare bums or queens swilling at the trough. They are often young people who are trying hard to find work and can't. This is a growing phenomenon. We can sing with joy in tune with such a world.

My sense of the reality—an unnecessary reality—and of the pervasiveness of tortures obsesses me. I care very much and am determined to do what I can to turn this around, though I fear, and not without reason, that I can do little to help in the struggle. But I will not become quietist and

give up and just go with the flow. This is why I bitterly write this book. The writing of other things intellectually fascinates me more but I will not fiddle while Rome burns.

The world very much needs a thorough changing. It has never been a rose garden and never will be, but at some historical times it has significantly changed and sometimes for the better. Such a changing, however, is not what is happening now. The Occupy Movement and the various Springs and the new (2014) distinctively different mayor of New York City and the people on his team are encouraging as well as what has happened in some other local elections in the United States with (among other things) the legalizing of marijuana and gay marriage. These are encouraging, but the increase in surveillance into people's lives, the massive spying is a very crucial matter making us feel that Orwell's *1984* is finally arriving. And the actions popping up against the availability of abortions are worrisome. And the endless drumbeat of wars, including what in reality are civil wars, does not make us jump with joy. People can get distracted with the Olympics or Hockey Night in Canada or Saturday Afternoon at the Opera, according to taste.

Even if we can only get a somewhat better world, a world in which a Rawlsian-like liberalism holds sway with a John Dewey style of intelligence extensively operative and with our social-economic order becoming somewhat more progressive, the Enlightenment will get a greater grip. We, that is, would get a world order that moves in a somewhat more progressive direction. We can be encouraged by the fact that the threat of a nuclear war is receding with Iran and the US et al., talking at last. Still, nuclear war is a terrible threat but so is another mainly manmade phenomena: extreme climate change. What is very worrisome is that we have climate change breathing down our necks with Canada's glory, Harper, and Australia's new twin glory, Abbott, in deep denial of it and its threat. Middling young crocodiles sliding away. Australia burns up, much of North America freezes while California doesn't but is in extreme drought. But even with this and other similar occurrences, there is no significant move toward tackling climate change. Obama is big talk, little do. Our world, if we look at it squarely and non-evasively, is a terrible place. And I have only been talking of the

developed world or, if you will, the so-called developed world. *Perhaps* I exaggerate? I think that is very unlikely. Indeed, when we consider the world as a whole I have no doubt that I have understated things.

Both nuclear war and climate change pose almost unspeakable human threats. Either could rid the world of us, or at least of most of us. Helping this possibility out we have worldwide water depletion. But young crocodiles like Stephen Harper and Tony Abbott do not have their fingers on the nuclear trigger like that loose cannon, Netanyahu, though he has so far kept his finger off it, as do our leaders in those parts of the world where they are its movers and shakers, namely the United States and China and to a certain extent Russia. Even the worst of the lot of world leaders have the minimal rationality to stay away from that mutually assured human destruction. (We cannot be so confident of North Korea.)

However, not so for what may well be a much slower but still a mutually assured human destruction, namely the manmade climate change that we are faced with. Stephen Harper and Tony Abbott beat the drum for denying such climate change. It is true that they are bit players compared with the leaders of the United States and China, but they come from large developed countries, not banana republics like the Bahamas or Grenada or the Seychelles. Australia and Canada are members of the Commonwealth and they “were jointly responsible for blocking a Commonwealth initiative to establish a climate fund for poor nations” (*The Guardian Weekly* Jan. 14, 2014, p. 48). But dreadfully conservative as they are, they are still traditionally conservative and not loose cannons like the Tea Partiers in the United States or the wildly loose cannons over nuclear warfare like the young ruler of North Korea. But they still are dangerously Neanderthal about climate change and they are not alone and even some non-Neanderthals like Obama about climate change drag their feet. It is now the non-action on climate change that is our greatest threat.

Climate change may put us human beings permanently out of business. Water disappearance will help us on the way. We may go the way of the dinosaurs. Even *if* that is exaggerated, things

surely look very bad and worldwide the effort to do something is minimal. With countries led by bad boys or bad girls, countries including the U.K., Canada, Australia, India, Indonesia, the USA, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Poland, we are surely in trouble.

The ever-increasing heat associated with the release of methane gas from the tundra as the permafrost melts and from the Arctic Ocean as the sea ice melts will be very damaging. There will be increased ferocity of storms, increased flooding, increased fires, increased droughts destroying crop yields, our water sources drying up and making the land so barren there will be no new crops. The Maghreb is getting it in the neck. This will increasingly drive people to other lands. Alberta will in the not too distant future be host to masses of Texans and other desperate people struggling for some *lebensraum*. And that has its more present parallels in Europe and between Africa and Europe.

Humans, or at least some humans, *may* learn how to cope. Science *may* somehow save some of us. But is it not scare-mongering or unreasonable to fear that *environmentally* it is already too late to keep catastrophic destruction at bay. The red line has been crossed. *Perhaps* here I am being too catastrophist. William D. Nordhaus and Paul Krugman, two eminent economists, while well aware of the danger, think so. Still, anyone like them who is the least bit informed and is not in denial realizes the situation is very dire, indeed grimly so, and is rapidly becoming more dire as time goes on. Both Nordhaus and Krugman, as well as James Hanson and Bill McKibben, all of whom are very well informed, do not dissent from this. Hanson, an eminent climate scientist and McKibben, an eminent climate activist, turn up—I think rightly—the volume of the alarm button. Nordhaus and Krugman turn the volume down a bit. But they are also keenly aware of the danger to us from matters that many of the powerful nations disgracefully drag their feet on. The United States, the U.K., Canada, Qatar and Australia are paradigms.

When I look out my study window on Boulevard Pie IX in Montreal, I see it crowded with cars, often big cars, buses and trucks, often huge trucks. Electric cars are almost nonexistent. I remember, by contrast, central streets in Amsterdam with electric trams, bikes, and people walking. I wonder

bitterly and fearfully at the madness of Canadian policy and people just accepting it passively. I have asked people why they don't buy electric cars. (I don't own a car myself.) They standardly answer, "Because they are too expensive." That strikes me as an inadequate answer since they will, in time, save money on gas. I then ask them, "Why are they so expensive? And why are there so few places to charge them up?" No answer. That just is so, they say or think, as if it were a fact of nature. But these are ready answers here. Moreover, it is not necessary that this is so. And the government or governments in Canada (I say governments because it is a provincial matter) could choose to help sales go along by making the license plates for electric cars free (as was done in Paris) so as to encourage people to buy them and thus help lessen the pollution of the environment. They could even give tax exemptions and they could give automakers who make electric cars subsidies helping to make their cars to become more profitable to make. But none of this is done.

However, Steven Harper and company will intone that this costs government money but so does new expensive jets and submarines and the like or building a sports stadium or hosting an Olympics or expensively training athletes so Canada can try with a chance of success to own the podium. There are, or should be, priorities. And Harper has not nearly got it. Priorities are badly and dangerously distorted again and again by his like in many countries and in Canada spectacularly so. There are plainly many other ways that government money is better used. Consider as even more stupid the extreme waste of Harper's making an artificial lake for the G20 meeting in Canada and the building of a highway to the far North over the frozen tundra to reach a community of 300 that was already accessible by air? What happens when the frozen tundra melts? Harper wants not only to own much of the North but to own the North Pole as well. Again, that costs money and, moreover, no nation should own the North Pole. But there is little money to fight global warming. That's compassionate conservatism for you. And with his largely manmade climate, so much for intelligent conservatism as well as intellectual incisiveness. Harper should abandon politics and turn to playing the piano in a clip joint.

We should ask what is all this expense on fighter jets and submarines for. Are we afraid the Americans are coming or the Chinese or the Iranians or the Venezuelans? Or are we afraid we need to fight off terrorism or that Denmark will take the disputed island between Canada and Denmark in the far north? A little bare rock island that is uninhabited and not usefully habitable. Is there any reasonable fear of any of those things happening or indeed any others that requires new military expenditures? All of this is very problematic. Why all this military expense? Canada could get on very well with just a police force and a coast guard principally for search and rescue missions. The United States and China could compete for in effect buying up Canada if they wanted to. But they are not interested in that though they are interested in profitable trade with Canada. But they do so in their own interests, not Canada's. Neither is the Salvation Army—nor is Canada for that matter.

Canada already, like Saudi Arabia, is a comprador state of the United States. It is better that Harper spends the government's money—supposedly the people's money—instead on the environment and on needed superstructures. But even he, like the big players here (the United States, China, Russia, and India) does next to nothing. Canada has an even worse environmental record than they do. But the tar sands project, with all its destructive effects, marches on and Harper and his government struggles, fearfully, for the Keystone Pipeline. Spending on the environment is just one of the many things that could be done to make things go better in the world but it is not done. And this is true of many things. Instead, money is spent to support corporate interests independently of human needs and often in opposition to those needs. And remember this is supposed to be the people's money.

There have been adequate and informed warnings of the danger of global warming for a long time but the world fracks on, the tar sands project proceeds and expands, and drilling in ever more dangerous places continues until the environment cracks. On and on it goes, taking stuff out of the ground that should remain there while little attention is paid to alternative solutions. From Copenhagen to Warsaw, the UN Climate Change Conference has become a farce. But that is not

derisively laughable. It is rather rooted in sadness, near despair, and in anger. The Warsaw Summit was perhaps the worst of all, with the Polish coal industry, supported by the Polish government, playing a big part in the proceedings. This was accompanied by and in part caused the massive and very public walkout of NGOs and the like over what was being done and avoided at the summit; things that are stupid, criminal or both.

I have focused here on the environment because of all our many threats it is the greatest threat. But I could have focused on other evils of capitalism, from factory life in garment factories of Bangladesh to Amazon's warehouses in the United States and elsewhere where workers are brutally treated. Following the practice of Walmart, Amazon calls their brutalized workers "associates". For both, these associates are being treated as if they are of no account. It is not only in the Third World that things go badly.

In all these pillars of decency it is not sadism or a *deliberate* policy of cruel treatment that rules the day but the high goddess of maximum profit for capital. Everything else, where it reasonably safely can, is sacrificed in the interests of the employers. I articulate such matters in what I intend to be convincing detail in the next chapter.

But we should also note a threat that has more recently gained our attention due centrally to the efforts of Edward Snowden; something for which he should have the Nobel Prize. Pervasively, we are coming to realize that our world, centered in the imperialistic homeland, the United States, and spreading globally, is becoming 1984-ish and Brave New World-ish. The U.S. is the big finger of the five fingers, of a coordinated spy apparatus. (The other four fingers are the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.) Surveillance is becoming very extensive throughout the developed and semi-developed world and wherever electronic mail can travel. Brazil and South Africa get it as much as the United States and Germany does. That Big Brother is watching is not paranoia.

I have in these last few paragraphs sunk into my bitter, ironical and sardonic mode; a mode that will be characteristic of the rest of this book. I want now to make a defense of this mode of expression that I am utilizing in this book. Perhaps proceeding as I do is inappropriate for a philosopher? But I ask you before you block up to consider, as you read on in this little book, am I not telling it like it is? And is this not something that we usually need to try very hard to do unless perhaps we are poets, *a certain kind* of novelist or *a certain kind* of short story writer, or some kind of comedian or futurist or a cruise ship crooner as Berlusconi once was and should have remained? That is, do we not need, if we are public intellectuals, to seek and unflinchingly and non-evasively so to get our accounts as near to saying it like it is as we can, and not to be satisfied with what we would like to believe or just like to communicate or to what we are attuned to? I think that intention just goes with having integrity. *Sometimes* irony and directed sarcasm are the best way of achieving that.

This goes with being concerned with writing with a serious political and normative intent. In my struggle to try to tell it like it is, I principally, but not exclusively, am in search of an answer, indeed a soundly based answer, to the question of what is to be done to right if only a little our world. This is something we realize we need to have an answer to if we are not to be intellectually, morally and politically fogged and if we are to gain a genuinely humanized and emancipated world. We, of course, in our endeavors may still be fogged, but we need not necessarily be so. We need not be caught in a capitalist fog or any other kind of idealized fog. To defog ourselves is something we must struggle for, realizing full well that we may very well fail.

I, of course, wish not to exaggerate, especially in a way that distorts. I use, not infrequently, hyperboles. However, hyperboles are not always, not even usually, out of order. Our language is full of them as it is of metaphors. Do they all, or even most of them, need cleaning up? They are, after all, exaggerations not intended to deceive. And they usually are not deceptive and do not need cleaning up. To claim that they are or usually do is preposterous and something that only a very unworldly and unrealistic philosopher could believe. It is scholastic pomposity. After all, to repeat, hyperboles

are, by definition, exaggerations not intended to deceive and there is no good reason to think that they typically do so. To think so is to be philosophically closeted.

The ills I gesture at in this prolegomena and discuss in detail in the body of this book are so obviously and odiously evident, once factual inquiry has exposed them, that they do not require or need some kind of abstract philosophical justification, elucidation or investigation. Irony and sarcasm are what is needed, where they are not acknowledged once their factual existence has been made plain.

Chapter 1: Our Wonderful World

Our world is a chamber of horrors and growing more so almost day by day, though many people placed like I am and perhaps most who will read this are comfortable enough or at least not uncomfortable. As I sit sipping an espresso in the comfort of my favorite café, I have little to complain about in my personal life. Maybe the music is not quite to my taste, but it sometimes is, particularly when they play the early Leonard Cohen. Everything they play will not always be to my liking but, after all, we need to be tolerant and democratically welcoming. I'm not a great fan of rap music but I am told by people I trust that sometimes it has good penetrating political messages. To me it sounds like largely unintelligible noise and racket. How I long for Bach or some medieval plain chant. But people are different and we must respect that and hope (for me, rather despairingly) that all people will have a sense of giving the other a fair shake. (Not what Obama self-deceptively thinks is a fair shake.) Some people talk too loudly in a café or restaurant, not even realizing they are bothering others and thus in a minor way impinging on the fair shake of others. Their parents should have taught them better when they were children. We shouldn't get exercised about that and things like that but discretely try to find a quiet corner if we can. People need to realize, and take to head and to heart, that the world wasn't made just for them. Tolerance, of course, has its limits but those limits should be broad.

But when I get home, if I turn on the radio, television or internet, before long I may be serenaded with news that on Obama's order drone strikes have killed twenty and that, based on his kill list, some of them were perhaps Al Qaeda or other such militants and some, usually most, were innocent 'collateral damage'. Sometimes the attack is a mistake. It was just a wedding party. More collateral damage? And then come Obama's pseudo-justifications, principally of the claim that such attacks help keep America safe. But it's all said to be in the name of keeping America safe. (Obama

often talks a good line. He is not in that way like his illustrious predecessor.) Or I may be serenaded with joyous news of 200 people in Bangladesh trapped and burned to death in an ill-protected locked-door garment factory where they were working for miserable wages at near slave labor for the maximum profit of the factories owners and as well for the at least tolerably safe profit for the likes of Walmart. Or I hear of gang rape in India with the death of the person raped and of her partner who tried vainly to protect her. I may also hear of another city in India or of one in China where an apartment building collapsed killing a hundred people. The collapse was caused by faulty construction where the construction company deliberately cut corners by ignoring safety regulations so that they could maximize their profits. Another of the blessings of capitalism. In the Chinese case, it would be their so-called socialism with Chinese characteristics; in reality, state capitalism. Or I may be informed of the incredible smog making driving dangerous in Beijing as well as the polluting agent (carbon dioxide) kicking up the cancer rate as well. Or I may hear about Canada's blessed tar sands and that a pipeline from the tar sands to the southern coast of the U.S. is imminent. And I may, as well, hear of the slaughter of sixty in Bagdad where something like that is becoming almost a daily occurrence. Were things that bad under the murderous tyrant Saddam Hussein and his assistant Chemical Ali? Or I may hear of eight protestors jailed, along with a few killed, in Egypt under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood or, depending on the date I turn on the radio, the Egyptian Army. Or I may hear that in the United States fast food workers are striking concerning wages that are so low that they cannot live on them and must go to food banks with the result that McDonalds, et al., while paying their workers low wages, profit from what is in effect subsidies from the U.S. government taken off the backs of tax payers. Is this the way capitalism is supposed to work? Or I may hear of Steven Harper's policies and perhaps even of his putting Canada near the top of the list of environmentally offending nations. So much for compassionate conservatism. Ditto for Australia (enhanced by their recent wonder, Tony Abbott) and the United Kingdom.

Though I personally fare well in such a marvelous state of affairs, I can very well be hostile, and am, and arguably rightly so hostile, concerning our 'wonderful world'. It is not something to be loyal to. Things have gone so far that there is no room to be skeptical about its rottenness or leave off giving the perpetrators anything like the benefit of the doubt. I am serenaded as I turn on my radio, television or internet with the delights of their doings. It is not that I do not want to hear of those things if they really are going on, and unfortunately they are, but I would like some reasonable accounts of *why* they are going on in that way and why such goings on are so persistent and why it is that we live in such a horrible world. Is it really so that nothing can be done about them without making things still worse? I don't believe that.

If I am the least bit selective, I will not fare as badly on the Internet listening to *Al Jazeera English* and *Democracy Now!* as I will with the standard mass media, though from the latter I will learn plenty about the horrors. *Al Jazeera* gives us a more comprehensive and impartial account of the facts that we usually get from the mainstream media. Even Hilary Clinton recognized that. *Democracy Now!* reports on facts that the mainstream media and even *Al Jazeera* avoid and provides as well perceptive interpretations and assessments of what is going on. It does the critical interpretation that investigative journalism should do. But *Al Jazeera English*, and I suspect *Al Jazeera Arabic* and *Al Jazeera America*, report, as does *Democracy Now!*, more fully on the delights I have been describing than do the mass media which, though in a more partisan way, reports on some of them, too. But the mass media also serenades us with trivia and not infrequently, particularly in North America, with advertisements which are not only boring and conducive to consumerism, but *sometimes* it is difficult to determine whether we are listening to news or to an advertisement. But, after all, that is what makes capitalism run. (But why so much more so in North America than in Europe? Are the North Americans more capitalist savvy?)

But standing back from the scenarios we are blessed with day in and day out, let me continue with some of the grim realities of our 'wonderful world'. Killing goes on in abundance. Not on the

scale of World War II or even World War I but with timeless pervasiveness: day after day, year after year, in so many places and with such brutality. These contemporary wars are without a declaration of war and typically without surrender and victory, and often not between nations or only sometimes between determinate sides within nations. But they are wars as in Libya or Syria. Sometimes the latter is called a civil war but it is not like the standard civil war such as the American Civil War or the Spanish Civil War or even like the American Revolutionary War or the civil war in Sri Lanka. In Libya, and more clearly so in Syria, diverse and often conflicting forces are involved with different aims and again without a declaration of war or without an acceptance of the rules of war. In World War II, both the Allied and the Axis forces took prisoners of war and had prisoner of war camps (though the Nazis usually killed their war prisoners if they were black or Jewish). Such camps were or are scant on the ground in Libya and Syria.

But in our 'wonderful world' we have massive killings that are not of state policy but often with state acquiescence. Moslems kill Christians in Pakistan. Buddhists kill Moslems in Myanmar. Jews kill Moslems in Palestine and Israel. In the past Moslems killed Jews with suicide bombers in Israel. And perhaps most spectacularly of all, in the Central African Republic Moslems and Christians butcher each other so that both fear to stay in their homes or go out in the streets and go instead to a few wretched shelters. Even the French troops sent back into their former colony have difficulty controlling it. And it is hardly likely or desirable that they will stay there for a long time. Still now they are much needed and reinforcements by other troops are needed. Such religious and/or ethnic conflict is overwhelming. Consider as well the Nuer and the Dinka in South Sudan. Such killing has spread through great swaths of the world. Don't tell me of our 'wonderful world'.

However, I have still further delights for you. We must also remember that the Chinese government oppresses and sometimes kills Tibetans and Moslems in its western provinces. We must also remember that Sunnis kill or harass Shiites, and Shiites kill or harass Sunnis. This is an ancient matter, though it waxes and wanes. But it is exacerbated recently and particularly in Iraq by the

American invasion and long encampment. Sunnis under Saddam Hussein had the power in Iraq but there was no massive killing or even much killing and not infrequently there was intermarriage between Sunnis and Shiites, though the Iraqis and the Iranians went after each other in a vicious war that was partly ignited by a Shiite and Sunni conflict. But generally in the past Sunni and Shiite conflict has been something like the divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Germany. But under U.S. occupation extensive and frequent killings began to occur between Sunnis and Shiites and have continued since the departure of the occupiers.

However, it is important that the United States and many of their now dwindling allies take people whom they regard as their enemies to be terrorists, just as does Assad in Syria. But they take these people as terrorists and liberally kill them while using 'terrorist' widely and loosely so that the word has become largely meaningless. It becomes hardly indistinguishable from someone who is taken to be a bad guy or at best a very bad guy or even someone deeply disliked that stands in opposition to you. Indeed, 'terrorist' comes to mean anyone that the Americans or Assad and his regime takes or suspects to be their enemy. In some respects it is like the American's no-fly list which is constantly and rather arbitrarily expanding. Moreover, if you are on the list they won't tell you why, though finally (I believe in 2006) Mandela got off the list though only sometime after Reagan, bless his enlightened soul, had listed him as a terrorist. Before that the United States government made exceptions for his flying to the U.S. Something like certain American blacks and Japanese for some occasions being made 'honorary whites' by Apartheid South Africa: the American blacks for certain visits and the Japanese for residence such as when they came there to study. But for the rank and file of Americans or others on the no-fly list, it is difficult to get off it or even to know why you are on it. It is not only that the United States is a secret surveillance state but secretive in many other ways as well. The drone program is of that order. But it also has contributed to a lot of murders of innocents as so-called collateral damage. Obama says, and perhaps truthfully, that he is regretful of these killings, but stolidly and falsely affirms that they are necessary to keep America safe. It is not

helpful let alone necessary for every dangerous enemy—allegedly or actually dangerous—to be killed along with the surrounding innocents. That killing creates several more to step into the terrorists' boots, if not today then down the road. It actually makes America less safe. More American flags are burned in Pakistan and Yemen and more militants sign up to attack America—some homegrown when they hear what is going on. George W. Bush, in his at least seemingly incorrigible innocence and ignorance, asked, "Why do they hate us?" I don't think Obama, either publicly or privately, would ask that question. He is not such an innocent. He probably knows very well why they hate us. But he persistently walks down the killing garden path that increases the hate. One might say without too much exaggeration that he sprints down it, making the United States less safe rather than more safe. Men, women and children continue to be killed unnecessarily. Has he had an impartial scientific examination done as to which policy will keep America safer? If he has, he hasn't revealed it.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the tribal areas of Pakistan, there is a lot of killing both by the Taliban and by American soldiers. The Taliban are certainly not mothers of charity, indeed they are fanatical and murderous. The Taliban also turn their guns and suicide bombers on Afghans and Pakistanis whom they take to be in conflict with or incompatible with their own ideology. It is not sufficient just to be a Moslem believer if you are not what the Taliban and their associates (*Boko Haram* and *El Shalrabi*, for examples) take to be the right kind of Islamists. Their killing sometimes includes even girls who try to get an education and particularly those who publicly press for it. Where they do not kill, they rigorously try to shut down girls' schools. And this vicious ethnocentric horror extends to North Africa, principally to North Eastern Africa where *Boko Haram* extends its blessing not only to girls but to boys who are receiving what in Nigeria is regarded, quite properly, as an internationally normal education, though no doubt with some Nigerian characteristics. But *Boko Haram* regards a Western style education as an ungodly and anti-Islamic education. To fight against it they have turned to massacres in North Eastern Africa in boarding

schools where boys have been killed in their beds. Another exemplification of our wonderful world in robust action!

To travel around the world a bit: In Canada we are still blessed with the past and continued raping and not infrequently subsequent murder, particularly but certainly not exclusively on the Canadian West Coast, of First Nations women. Moreover, in many First Nations villages people are living in wretched conditions. Our blessed Stephen Harper has money to spend on submarines and fancy new fighter jets, artificial lakes in Ontario for a G20 meeting, and even for a statue of a dog, but nothing even near to adequate to correct the wretched living conditions that not a few First Nations people are saddled with. In some First Nations communities in Canada, a land of abundance, these communities are approaching utter insufficiency in housing and, more generally, have wretched conditions. As a result of their conditions of life they come to have lives of despair and hopelessness, often either excessive drug taking and/or drunkenness with their children sniffing gasoline. There is nothing like this in non-First Nations parts of Canada and Quebec, though paradise does not reign there either. There is (2013), driven by these harsh conditions, the emancipatory movement of “Idle No More” and the rest of us should be in solidarity with that. All the while Harper is obsessed with balancing the budget. Let the superstructures crumble and scientific research centers close.

Still, the despair and hopelessness that the wretched conditions of most of such populations cause leads, thankfully—I think almost miraculously—to struggle and resistance. And this resistance has recently increased. Long live that until these horrible conditions are utterly eradicated. We must not turn a blind eye and we must also press a commitment to stopping the suicide rates in these societies. Moreover, we must realize that it is no wonder these people commit suicide. The suicide rate is even more severe elsewhere with some other so-called primitive peoples. The Guarani of Brazil are far more likely to kill themselves than Canadian First Nations peoples and thirty-four times more than Brazil’s national average, making it one of the highest suicide rates in the world and leading some to speak of a silent genocide going on. While it is *in a way* hyperbolic, to so label it, it is

not like the Hutu's slaughter of the Tutsis in Rwanda. But such a remark is well directed all the same. The Guarani are agricultural people, but they have had their land taken away or ruined for them in Brazil and they have no way of living as they have for so long in the past. In some ways it is comparable to what has been done to the Bedouins in Israel and to what colonists have been adept at in the past. Their way of life and their very livelihood have been destroyed.

And speaking of suicide, on average twenty-two American soldiers on active duty in Afghanistan or on returning home to the U.S. kill themselves each day. War-related stress disorder is very common for U.S. combat forces and is very inadequately treated by military medical personnel. The same continues to be true for soldiers returning from the war in Afghanistan. And ditto, though to a lesser degree, for Canadian soldiers returning from Afghanistan. Sexual assault is also on the rise in the armed services and it is likewise very inadequately addressed. In both cases the situation is very scandalous. Again, more evidence of what a wonderful world we live in. (It can be seen why I said in the last paragraph of my Prolegomena that abstract philosophical or other such justification is not in order but condemnation through irony and sarcasm is. That grave ills obtain and unnecessarily so is too obvious to require efforts at justification.)

Chapter 2: Conceptual Clarification Is of Little Help

There is no cleaning up the wretched mess our world that consists of just getting a good conceptual analysis of what a good, just and emancipated world would be. Clarity may *sometimes* mildly help. I am not, of course, against clarity. What I resist is philosophers' penchant to give it the emphasis they do and sometimes to in effect treat it as a holy grail. Talk of a return to reason is too much like having a turning wheel which turns no machinery. We can be very clear about our situation and it still can be hellish and we may have no idea, with all our clarity, about how to make it less hellish. Our being clear about how our world is is more likely to generate a better understanding of its hellishness than it is for us to understand how we can be on the road to help in making it even somewhat better. We can, of course, conjure up some utopian situation in which it would be better but how even to begin to make that utopian conception a social reality can very well escape us. With a better understanding of the harsh realities involved and with their deep entrenchment it is more likely to make us even more pessimistic and more embittered. With little understanding of what can be done to make it better.

In the previous chapter I expressed a very pessimistic view about the possibility of achieving even anything that looks like a progressive free and egalitarian world order. To gain such a world order, or even at least something moving in that direction, is something I am thoroughly and passionately committed to, however unlikely attaining it or even approximating it may be. However, when I take a hard non-evasive look at the world I, at least as I go on looking at things, become more and more pessimistic about our chances of attaining it or even attaining something that approximates it. That does not *at all* mean to cut back our struggle for it. Not one bit. We may, however, go about changing our emphasis about how best to struggle. But it does make one very pessimistic about what is likely to be achieved. One should not, however, *quietistically*, Rorty-like, live with it, but should

fight for a better world no matter what the odds are (Rorty 2006). I shall attempt to show the importance of this in this chapter.

First I set this against what I take, and not without reason, to be *an understanding* of what it would be like to achieve emancipation or to achieve liberty and equality. In struggling for justice we will not do much to achieve justice *in its so-called purity* and in its so-called essentiality (even if there are such things to be known). Such investigations will not help much, if anything at all, in achieving a somewhat decent social order, to say nothing about a just and emancipated one. No *conceptual analysis* of any of these matters, in their purity or otherwise, will do much to contribute to attaining such an order, any more than just understanding morality will make us moral or knowing more about goodness will make us good. Rorty is right about this (Rorty 2006).

Of course, if you understand nothing of the use of 'good' or its equivalent in some other language, you could not knowingly or wittingly be good, but still that is not what makes you good. Your behavior reveals that. You could, of course, be unwittingly good, have goodness built into your natural sympathies, as Hume thought, something that comes naturally to persons, something you just will do instinctively as an infant will instinctively suck a breast that is pressed to its mouth. But whether it is so instinctive or not, we initially normally get acculturated into something that is regarded as decency in our society without much in the way of understanding. Something like that may hold for our Humean natural sympathies where the enculturation usually sticks. To be a decent person may normally be something that is built into a human being living in a society. What an infant would be like raised in a chicken coop as a chicken we do not know.

You need not understand an analysis of 'decent' and 'indecent' to have *this* primitively acculturated understanding. You could not even understand such a conceptual analysis of 'decent' unless you had this primitive understanding of 'decent' and 'indecent', unless you had such know-how.

Socrates was wrong as is Socratism as well. Philosophy is a waste of time here. It is no more help in establishing a moral order than is finding out about Mars. Assuming we understand the use of 'good', something we achieve early in life, we will know that certain things are good. Sharing the goodies is good. Grabbing them all for yourself is bad and so on gradually to more complicated examples is something we start learning as children long before we learn, if ever we do learn, about conceptual analysis. We learn principally by paradigms, including at a more advanced stage novels and films. Still, that is rooted in the more primitive understandings where we are just taught, conditioned, to act in accordance with certain practices. Before long some things can be known to be good or bad, decent or indecent, fair or unfair and certain things either way problematically so. Here, in this last part, conceptual analysis may help a bit but we could not even gain a sense of what 'problematically' comes to here unless we had an anchorage in something that was unproblematically so—something we gain without philosophy. And we cannot turn to philosophy for its deliverance. It is a matter of what we just do; what we learn, so to say, at our mother's knee. First comes the practice; only then can we come, if we do, to make analyses. It is in practice that we get our firmest grounding or anchorage. Philosophy is invariably *second order*. It is there at the *first order*, with the ongoing practices, where things get most fundamentally settled. Kierkegaard was right about what he called Socratism.

If we candidly and resolutely honestly look with this anchorage at what goes on in the world it will not be difficult to conclude that it is a hellhole. We know that without the need for conceptual analysis or theoretical knowledge or sophistication; we know it without the study of philosophy. And none of these things will lead us to have any doubts here, if we can hold on to our hats. Our not inaccurate descriptions of the world that I have given in my first chapter vividly show that horrible happenings abound, happenings that for the most part do not need to have happened. Some obviously so, such as indentured labor. Here is where a concrete empirical examination and moral reflection on it that enhances our knowledge and understanding of what our world is like is crucial.

This is principally a matter of acquiring empirical knowledge, including as accurate an account as we can reasonably get of the various aspects of our world. This does not normally require conceptual analysis. What we need are accounts culminating in comprehensive descriptions of what life is like and an empirically rooted understanding of how it could be better and, where we can get them, causal explanations of what goes on in the world. Our comprehensive empirical descriptions are invariably also interpretive. This is both inescapable and often valuable. Moreover, there are good, bad and mediocre interpretations. But reflectively sustainable interpretations or even remotely reasonable interpretations plainly give us to understand that throwing children, or for that matter, anyone into boiling oil or just gassing them because they are people that we do not approve of are vile evil acts. No philosophy is going to gainsay that and we do not need philosophy to establish that or know that. And certainly it cannot disestablish that.

Moreover, there is no interpretation, no matter how sophisticated and philosophically nuanced, that can at all gainsay that. It is not just from my point of view that such sadism or human cruelty is evil and from others it is good or from some others that it is just a matter of what might just happen to be done around here. Some places they go in for gassing. Some places they do not. That's all we can rationally say about it. It is just a matter of morals by cultural agreement. It is just a matter of what some people happen to prefer and that is all we can objectively say about it. We don't prefer certain things, but others do. To think this way is evasive.

The things I have been speaking of are just grossly and plainly evil. Any philosophy that denies this or ignores this can, and should, be just ignored. And we do not need philosophy to establish that it can be and should be ignored. An embedded correspondent going into a just-liberated Nazi concentration camp and reporting there were some inmates there who looked somewhat emaciated would be misreporting. There were prisoners looking more like skeletons of human beings. There was grossness there almost beyond human imagination. And that was indisputably plain. We have ample recorded film footage to verify that. What we see there is terrible

evil. There is just a plain gut consciousness of this that even a heavy and intense concentration of Nazi ideology will not utterly stifle. Jonathan Littell, in his novel about Nazi life, *The Kindly Ones*, reveals a part of that. There is a scene depicting some elements of the early days of the Nazi's Soviet invasion. The Nazi soldiers had rounded up some Jews (men, women and children). The soldiers dig some neat straight trenches, all deep enough for three bodies dumped on top of each other. Then they began their morning's work of murdering them, putting one dead bleeding body on top of another in an orderly fashion. When they had finished their grizzly work, they went to lunch in their canteen and were served blood sausage. They couldn't eat it and revolted against being served it. This shows something about their gut reactions. Horrible evil was staring them in the face, but they did what they regarded as their duty. But, later in his novel, Littell also shows how conditioning can blunt, perhaps even eradicate, such gut sensibilities describing a later stage of the war when the Nazis were facing defeat. Littell has a scene in Auschwitz where an economist in charge of labor productivity there walks over the horribly brutal killing grounds, stepping over battered bodies writhing in the mud in their bloody death agonies. He hardly notices these bodies and only enough to step over them so as not to dirty his boots or step in the bloodied mud. All the while he continues to discuss with a colleague what they should do to increase labor productivity.

There we have a scene, a realistic scene, where human sensibilities have been utterly blunted—I am inclined to say eradicated. What are we to say to that but that it was unspeakably vile and utterly humanly intolerable? Yet there were at least seemingly rational people who tolerated it and went about their business as usual, asking how productivity might be increased.

It is not only our beloved Nazis who do vile things like that. The Turks did it to the Armenians. Both Stalin and Obama had or have their killing lists. With the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, the Croats did it to the Serbs and the Serbs did it to the Croats and the ethnic Albanian population got it from the Serbs and the Croats. As I write this (December 2013), in South Sudan the Nuer are dishing it out to the Dinka and the Dinka to the Nuer. In the Central African Republic, Christians kill Moslems

and Moslems kill Christians. In the Near East, Jews kill Palestinians and Palestinians, though to a lesser extent, kill Jews. (Do numbers count for much if anything? It would be offensive for someone to say, "It wasn't seven million; it was only five million that we killed." As if that would make it less vile.) And Sunnis kill Shiites and Shiites Sunnis in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. And not to neglect the Americans, they exterminated large portions of their native population and put the rest on dreadful reservations. It was once a good Sunday afternoon sport in California to go out and shoot a couple of Indians, like you might go deer hunting or have a picnic. There were also Americans murdering Filipinos when American soldiers occupied the Philippines.

I do not deny that scale matters. The Nazis outdid themselves with the help of modern technology and in some places the killings, though extreme, are *more* random as in South Sudan and the Central African Republic than with the Nazi killing machine. But they are all vicious, brutal, infused with hatred and sometimes rooted in fear. All were plainly evil; an evil that requires no theory for its recognition, including philosophical theory. And no philosophical theory will 'cure' that.

We do not need philosophy or even any reflective thought or science to realize that or any theory to establish that. It is just there, like our sense of humanity, our sense of how we humans must treat and be treated by our fellow human beings. But we will need empirical descriptions, often reasonably detailed descriptions and almost always what Hilary Putnam calls thick descriptions (Putnam 2002). To say that this is what reason requires is just arm waving. It adds nothing. There are no deeper, more fundamentally deep grounds that are the real justification for such things being evil. Kant, and not a few others, were or are giving us philosophical fairy tales.

There are few people, even in countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the European countries, to speak of only a few countries, who do not regard such things (to put it mildly) as cruel and brutish and plainly evil. They *might* not describe some of them as brutish and evil, particularly when they occur in their homeland. There they are not unlikely to be in a state of

denial. They are reluctant to befoul their own nest. But they are interestingly becoming fewer. (Do numbers count? They *sometimes* count as when there is more and more inequality. But they usually do not count decisively. The Turkish genocide of the Armenians was not less evil than the Nazi killing of Jews and Roma because the Turks killed fewer people. After all, there were fewer Armenians to kill and the Turks' killing methods were much less technologically developed. That doesn't make them less evil and the Nazi murders would not have been less evil if they had neither just killed Roma or just killed Jews or had killed one million rather than nine million.)

However, cross culturally and cross temporally, things do not go as well or at least so smoothly. The Incas and the Aztecs (though in somewhat different ways) engaged in horrible killings that at least their upper classes and probably pretty much their peoples as a whole took to be morally and religiously required. The Nazis, people considerably closer to us both temporally and culturally, did horrible things as well, though they rationalized them differently. It was, they believed, their racial (actually pseudo-racial) doctrines that made it morally necessary to gain a *Juden frei welt*. But we should also remember that Christians burned people at the stake in public spectacles and also beheaded people as another public spectacle. It was for the multitude an outing. Christian I of Denmark put to the sword a third of the population of Stockholm (men, women and children) and burned down Stockholm which was then a city with buildings largely made of wood. In the American South before the Civil War, slaves were tied to posts and brutally lashed so that they would keep in line. There was lynching in the post-Civil War South and even today people, most often people of color, are tried and sometimes put in prison for life without the possibility of parole for minor non-violent crimes, e.g., stealing a jacket from a store, trying to cash a stolen cheque for fifty dollars, selling marijuana—they can end up for short periods in jail for just possessing it. White folks don't usually get treated so harshly particularly when they come from reasonably well off families.

Not all people 'see' the same things when things are seen to be deeply and unquestioningly evil. Yet to be 'morally blind' is to be figuratively blind. There is not an eye operation that can cure

it, like an operation to remove cataracts which are impeding your sight. There is nothing like moral cataracts that can be removed to cure moral blindness. What is taken as an evil there is not like something that every sighted person just sees but something whose recognition often varies over space and time. This is, of course, unsettling but again it is a telling it like it is. Just learn something about Inca or Nazi practices. That will not soften your reaction to them but you will learn something about what has gone on in our lovely world. Some of the core moral beliefs of Western people of our time and place are not universally accepted. But it was not because either the Incan priest practicing such things or Hitler had bad eyesight. We do not literally see or fail to see what is right or wrong as we see a huge rock in the middle of our path. 'Moral blindness', as I have remarked, is figurative. We can see that someone's fingernails are being pulled out and we might, and indeed should, say that if you can't see that that is evil, indeed vile, then you are morally blind. But some people can see it without seeing that it is evil. Some brutal sadists may even enjoy seeing it and/or doing it. Some of the rank and file of the SS were like that, as were some of the capos. It is not that these non-seers, non-hearers needed glasses or eye operations or hearing aids. There are not two seeings, one a seeing that fingernails are being pulled out or have been pulled out and another seeing, that is a distinct literal seeing, that it is evil. When we say of someone that they cannot see that pulling out fingernails is evil, to say nothing of the Nazi horrors of the concentration camps, we mean that we take these things to be so plainly evil that there can be no question of their evilness and no need for backing that up with some argument to show that it really is evil. It is just plainly evident, though not like a seeing that little green leaves are starting to grow on trees in spring.

There are places where moral argument stops. Indeed it is gross for it to even start. And there just are unquestionable claims for the universal acceptability of moral convictions, even when they may not be universally accepted. It is an awareness that while not all *homo sapiens* accept the judgment, the unshakeable conviction for us Westerners and people like us, is that all human beings should have certain beliefs. But this conviction is compatible with the awareness that there were

Incan priests who normally did horrible things that both they and their populations took to be ritually acceptable. Indeed the Incan priests regarded as acceptable things we regard as utterly abhorrent as well as absurd. And similar things, though not quite so extreme from our point of view, were done by the Plains Indian tribes, such as the Comanche. In so reacting, are we being ethnocentric? Are we being dogmatic? What are taken by us to be the core and the very kernel of what must not be done does not have that pan-cultural, pan-temporal ubiquity. That 'seeing', if that is what we call it, is not like seeing that it is snowing or that the wind is blowing or that the sun is setting. All of us, if we can literally see, see the same things here. But that is not so concerning the ubiquity of a common kernel of moral convictions. There is neither a literal seeing of it nor an ubiquity about it. There is here, whether we like it or not, variability across space and time. Read about the Incas or the Aztecs, both highly developed cultures. There is no seeing or hearing or literal feeling here across space and time. They and we are both *homo sapiens* yet there is no or at least little understanding or mutual attunement across cultures. There is no feeling like feeling an itch in your back or a pain in your foot or your feeling tired common to us here. We remain worlds apart concerning some deep moral responses. Having a sensory apparatus or a functioning brain or an enculturation is not enough. It depends on which kind of enculturation, though it indeed depends on enculturation.

We need an enculturation. We must have it to be functioning humans, but what we need is an enculturation that yields an understanding which is an emancipatory understanding that generates social structures that yield a strong conviction of the rottenness, often the extreme vileness of the things I have spoken of, e.g., the fingernail pulling, the boiling of babies in water just to watch them scream, the killing and chopping up of a person into pieces and then mailing those pieces around the country (something that recently happened in Montreal). These are all incredibly evil things, vile things and are done by freaks in our culture who are in some way insane. The Montreal perpetrator, however, was, after chopping up and mailing the body parts, adept enough to flee Quebec and was, only after some difficulty in tracing him, caught up to while he sipped his cappuccino

in a café in Berlin. He knew enough to get the right stamps to put on each gruesome package and where to send them. He wasn't someone with infantilizing dementia. Eichmann was clever enough to flee to Argentina and live there for a long time before he was caught. And *pace* Hannah Arendt, he was an enthusiastic anti-Semite with a crowbar hacking up the interior of a synagogue in Berlin on *Kristalnacht*, though she was right in noting there were plenty of cogs in the Nazi apparatus who were rather mechanically committing atrocities. But Eichmann wasn't just a cog; he was an engaged anti-Semite keeping Nazi ideology.

What we need with all of these monsters and even the faceless non-monsters, the cogs, among them, is to be able to stop them and indeed to stop them and, where possible, to change our world so there will be no, or at least far fewer, such people, and where they do come into being with us, they will never be able to gain power or influence or even be able individually to commit such gruesome acts. That should be obvious. (Again, do we need a philosopher or have to have a theory to know that? I don't think so.) And to do this with any effect we must have some considerable knowledge; knowledge that social scientists and investigative journalists gain, or can gain, and sometimes accounts that novelists (think of Zola), filmmakers (think of Ken Loach) and some song writers (Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie) can provide. We need all these things. Philosophy has not much of a role to play here and where it has any role at all it is dependent on the above things (though this is not how philosophers usually see it). We need the knowledge and understanding I have described to know what is of crucial concern and particularly what, if anything, can be done about it. We can clearly enough know that the world must change and change deeply for it is now monstrous. It must change and change radically. The thing is to know how to change it and then to be able to change it. To do so we not only need an iron will, but intelligence and the recognition that it will be hard. We must realize that there is a lot we must come to know in the empirical domains I have mentioned, and no doubt in others as well. And we must further recognize that we will again and again make mistakes and that we may never get an emancipated world, a world where people intelligently care not only

about themselves and those close to them but also more widely about each other. But we must also have here the commitment and the will to struggle to change it in that direction. Well informed bastards or well informed indifferents or slightly less culpable quietists are all around. But caring is not enough either. We have plenty of caring sob-sisters and sob-brothers around. What we need is empathetic and knowledgeable intelligent caring that includes caring for all humanity and a care that all as equally as possible achieve, to the extent possible, their maximum flourishing. Of course, we as individuals or as groups can actively care for no more than a few people. But we can care and do what we can to support the coming into being of a world with an ethos where everyone is committed to a world where there is an intelligent and thoughtful reciprocal caring across the board for all humans. We may be able to do something about what goes on on our own turf, but we should not be indifferent to what goes on in South Sudan or the Central African Republic. If this is to be moralistic, so be it.

Chapter 3: Reflections on Our Recent Blessings

So I have argued in the previous chapters how horrible our cruel world is. The whole bloody thing (literally often bloody) is horrible, though more so in some places than in others. It is clearly worse in the Central Africa Republic than in Finland, for example. Recorded human history at least has always been like that and it shows little in the way of signs of getting better and more emancipated, though in some ways it is better. An amputation now, as unfortunate and painful as it is, is far less bad than in the 16th century. But in some ways, the 21st century is worse than the 16th century. The 21st century is far more 1984-ish than the 16th century was. The killing is more constant, and the surveillance state is becoming ever more menacing.

Yet a better world is at least conceptually possible. It could at least not be as wretched as the world we know now. We have a somewhat coherent conception of what a better world would be like. Marx did a pretty good job of that. *Weltpolitik* political realists from Kennan to Kagen to Brzezinski with their liberal world internationalism kept in business by American power less so. But they show, for all their realism, how in some ways it could be better. Both sorts of people, however, have the virtue of not being moralists, as Ronald Dworkin, Patrick Devlin, Robert Nozick and Charles Taylor were or are. But all this aside, the most important thing is to recognize that on the ground there is little in the way of a sign that the world is going in an emancipatory direction. Nancy Fraser gives us a good sign of what emancipation would be like but there is nothing like that developing on the road that we are taking.

However, I want in this chapter to correct the impression of something I may be taken to be claiming. I may sound like a catastrophist, a secular version of Solzhenitsyn. *Perhaps*, even *very perhaps*, I am too much like that concerning climate change, though global warming and, more generally, climate change puts the fear of the non-God in me. Just think, for example, when masses

of methane get into the air, when the permafrost of the tundra melts and the sea ice of the Arctic melts. However, *some* who are knowledgeable about climate change think that people like me are too alarmist. They think we can, if we intelligently use science, adjust. William D. Nordhaus and Paul Krugman intelligently argue for this while clearly recognizing the dangers of climate change. While, by contrast, climate change scientists such as James Hansen and activists like Bill McKibben believe and also clearly argue that we are in a very, very dangerous situation. Yet Nordhaus and Krugman and Hansen and McKibben all recognize the dangers. But the first pair think there are reasonable chances that even now it need not end in catastrophe if we make reasonable changes. I hope so, but I am more inclined, like Hansen and McKibben, to think catastrophe is staring us in the face and that it looks like our chances of averting it are increasingly dim. That, of course, does not mean that we should not struggle, no matter how bad our chances, to avert disasters. But we should be informed and as clearheaded as we can be about our situation.

All four of these public intellectuals see climate change and global warming as a dangerous threat, but Nordhaus and Krugman are not as catastrophist, as some call it, as I am and as well as the much more informed Hansen and McKibben are. But whether Hansen and McKibben or Nordhaus and Krugman are closer to telling it like it is, we should, as a matter of being practical, take the former's claims concerning environmental practice as the road to be taken, the practice to be followed, whether you call it catastrophist or not. And this is because of the soundness of the *precautionary principle*, something cogently argued for some time ago by Brian Barry. The following of the precautionary principle is exemplified in a simple way by those who walk some distance to work and when the weather report says there is a 60 to 70 percent or more chance it will rain take an umbrella. Hansen and McKibben are umbrella takers, as indeed not a few others are who raise alarm bells over the very averse situation we—the world's populations—are very likely to find ourselves in unless we very rapidly and resolutely act somewhat in the way Hansen and McKibben urgently recommend. If we are at all reasonable we will follow them acting on the precautionary

principle just as reasonable people will take an umbrella when they must walk some distance to work and rain threatens. It may after all not rain but following the precautionary principle it is still the reasonable thing to do. And there is no sensible question in most situations of asking why. It is evident enough.

Climate change may not be as disastrous as Hanson and McKibben believe, but the reasonable thing concerning it is to act on the precautionary principle when the prospect of climate disaster is imminent. There is no reasonable option to ignoring those ringing bells, even if Nordhaus and Krugman's outcome is in fact more likely to be the case. We are playing with fire here.

As in the umbrella business, so in the climate change business—though, of course, the latter is utterly more important—it is better to be safe than sorry. That is plain common sense. *Sometimes* it may be negatively ideological but not always and in this case not at all.

Obama, Merkel and a few others (not Harper or Abbott) make some somewhat reassuring noises and take some very timid environmental steps for improvement. But they are little more than mere noises given the way things are going. Think of the farce of the Warsaw Climate Change Conference: the Polish government's actions with its 'clean coal initiative' were as harmful as the behavior of the U.S. at the Copenhagen conference and at subsequent conferences. Such behavior would make for contemptuous laughing if the situation were not so serious. The U.S. as the present hegemonic lynchpin of the world system has engaged in dangerous unconstructive actions in such UN climate change conferences at least since Copenhagen, actions followed obediently by Canada. The U.S. and Canada have continued to engage in excessive and dangerous foot-dragging. In the recent Warsaw Conference, both finally, sadly and rightly, through their intransigent behavior, provoked a walkout of many participants. This was bad in that it showed signs of the desperateness on the part of those who are determined to do something about climate change and it was good in that it revealed that we have nothing good to expect from our masters of the earth. They will do nothing significant about climate change and are more likely to make it worse. So act our 'kindly

ones', including in what is said in some quarters to be the greatest democracy in the world, the fountain of all our hopes. Or if they ever try to do anything significant, they will be too desperately scuttling around uselessly like a bunch of bees when their beehive is being destroyed. All power to the corporate elite!

Catastrophist or not, I speak out here as well as elsewhere against the rottenness of our world; a rottenness that lets world conditions be brought on that are horrendous and sustains these conditions. Our masters do next to nothing about it except not infrequently to make it worse. Some political leaders are in bed with the fossil fuel industry. I speak out against this planetary threat. There are a lot of things that are rotten in our social, political and economic lives, matters that are usually interconnected. But the planetary threat to our lives over climate change is the most crucial one, threatening the very habitability of animal life, including human life—all humanity—as well as that of other animals. But it is we humans that are doing the damage. There is a lot more to be opposed to and to be righted but climate change is the most crucial issue we face. Without somehow stopping the extent of climate change, all the rest is useless. If it goes as far as it seems to be going, it is game over.

It is true that North America and Europe are in shambles and that we should unshamble them and then unshamble the rest of the world. There is indeed a lot to unshamble. We have some local decencies, e.g., Iceland and Finland, but almost everywhere in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent, life for most people, the legendary 99%, is bad and in not a few places hellish.

Some will say I exaggerate. My life goes okay and that is true in North America and Europe for many of the top income earners, the wealthiest 10%, maybe for the top 20%. And that is somewhat true as well in India, Indonesia, China, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and a lot of Latin America. However, there is a lot of misery going around as well. Look at the paradise in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Mali, Haiti, Bangladesh, et al. Look at the fate of the *underclass* pervasive over almost all the world and growing.

I am a retired emeritus professor living in Montreal, I have little personal complaint about how my life goes except that I don't adjust so well to increasing modernity and I am in the midst of some young, moderately offbeat neighbors. But I am in the midst of an underclass as well, including young poorly educated youth either without a job at all or, like what is common in South Africa, considerable haphazard marginal employment with no future and no hope. *Some* are part of the homeless. And even the region of East Montreal that I live in is affluent compared to huge swaths of the world. Indeed we live in a wonderful world, made more wonderful by the threat of climate change that, like the gentle rains from heaven, will come down on us all, rich and poor alike. Gated villages won't help. Is this something we should be grateful for? Let us mock those politicians who speak blissfully, as does Obama, of giving us a fair shake. A fair shake at burning up!

However, it is also the case that there are some comparative bright spots in the world and some of these are growing brighter. I say this without sarcasm or even irony, but keep in mind the need to exclude climate change which is a global matter and a 'blessing' for us all, rich and poor alike, though even here, for a time, it is harder on Africa than it is on Canada or Northern Europe. But that very considerable consideration aside, there are comparative bright spots—or should I say, brighter spots—in the world, not only the traditional bright spots such as prominently in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, but more recently in much of Latin America. For examples of one way of things being brighter, think of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile (2013-24). And for another, think of the more radical states of Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. (But it is important to note that the two ways cooperate with each other in a friendly manner.) All of these countries are better, indeed much better, off than they were before they had gotten out of the Yankee pond. Think, for a moment, of Chile: a growing, wealthy capitalist nation taking again a moderately Leftist turn with the election victory of Bachelet, elected for a second time as leader of her country. She stepped down when she was prime minister for a while when her term ended and did not illegally run again, as is so common among leaders, so as to not violate the Chilean constitution about running immediately for reelection,

though she was very popular. She is not at all like Mugabe making himself president for life. After stepping down, she could run again without any meddling with the constitution. A progressive and a mild pale pink socialist, she is popular on a program of amending the constitution away from its Pinochet scars, closing a bit the gap between the rich and the poor and providing free university education. Moreover, there have also been elected to the Chilean Parliament two students, formerly prominent members of the student organization for free university education, and a chancellor of a university. They are all members of the Communist Party. Imagine anything like this happening in the blessed U.S., the U.K. or Canada. When Obama shook the hand of Raul Castro at Mandela's funeral it was said by some glorious Republican members of Congress that it was like shaking the hand of Adolf Hitler. All of these Latin American countries are free or freer of the U.S. embrace although the U.S. is in an underhanded way trying to undo Venezuela's move to socialism. It is not surprising that three U.S. diplomats were expelled by Venezuela. These countries show concern for their populations. They do not treat the poor like non-human animals and there are now no disappeared. We get in all these countries places where there is a real concern about inequality with a start at lifting people out of poverty, giving them a voice with some power going along with a voice in changing the structures of exploitation in their societies and toward meeting human needs. They are not like the U.S., the U.K. and Canada where things are going in the reverse direction.

We must not forget there are these bright spots and that, if climate change doesn't shut it down, their voyage is just beginning. There are, of course many obstacles to overcome. But such progressive moving along is not the way of most of the world. Think in the developed world of the working conditions in Amazon's warehouses and in Walmart's stores, the wages in the fast food industry. Indeed, in established industries working conditions are deteriorating and there is a growing army of unemployed. Workers have to make more and more concessions to their employers. Moving away from the developed world, the conditions of workers in Bangladesh's garment factories, the conditions of workers in Pakistan's brick factories, the conditions of workers in many places in

China, India and Indonesia are wretched. Some *animals* are better off than these workers are and these places are not alone. All with the aim of maximum capital profitability. Certainly not the meeting of needs.

There is Scandinavia. It is no longer as in the Olaf Palme era such a bastion of hope, though it is still humanely civilized. It is not Hungary, the United States, Canada or Germany left with such sweet singers as Obama and Merkel and Orbán, and a Harper who cannot sing at all or Japan's prime minister moving firmly to the right. Still, as more civilized as Sweden and Finland are, they are now in certain ways taking two steps backward for one step forward, particularly over immigration, though they still look good compared with the U.K. and the U.S. And compare Norway's prisons to those of the U.S., to say nothing of the differences in the incarceration rates. Little Iceland has recovered itself from its fiscal disorder. There is no austerity there. Scandinavia generally compared with the rest of Europe to its south—including Germany—is progressive and encouraging. It is also progressive when compared to North America, though even there among the lot, Quebec is a little brighter. And even in the United States, that fortress of democracy and emancipation, people are perhaps beginning to say, perhaps in partial thanks to Occupy, 'Enough is enough! Enough of the austerity programs of neo-liberalism. Enough of neo-liberalism!' Sometimes socialism gets affirmatively mentioned. And the election (2014) of the new mayor of New York City is even more encouraging. He is determined and gutsy and trying to move in a progressive and emancipatory path. Enough of Clintonist neo-liberalism and back to the ethos of FDR and his onetime sidekick Henry Douglas. Perhaps like Obama he may let us down, but perhaps not. Perhaps he will achieve for New York City what he wishes to and it can become a beacon for the rest of the United States. Perhaps instead he will be crushed by the neo-liberal capitalist forces. But perhaps not. With him and the people around him we have reason to hope, though his appointment of a new police chief arouses some worry. But it may be just an artful throwing of some crumbs to the dogs. Something that will not harm his program.

So, to generalize and summarize what I have been writing in these last few pages, I have not been claiming that everywhere it is so equally rotten as it is in the United States and, in a different way, as it is in Greece, Ireland or Spain. In some places there is some hope of, if not curing it, at least lessening the rot. And even in some of our rotten places not everything is rotten. To claim that would be irrational. But when we look at things generally and worldwide, our world is genuinely rotten.

I am not exaggerating when I say the world is rotten. Look, for example, at the Amazon factories that dot the landscape of the developed world. We don't have to go to the garment factories of Bangladesh and India or the brick factories with their indentured labor in Pakistan or the *gastarbeiter* of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to see the rottenness. The Walmarts and the Amazon factories of the developed world or the wages and conditions of life in the fast food industry will fit the bill. The Amazon wage factories are freezing cold in the winter and blazing hot in the summer without air conditioners. They don't waste money on heating or air conditioning. In summer they have a couple of ambulances waiting outside to take away those who collapse. That is cheaper than installing air conditioning. Their employees—associates, as they are deceitfully called—work not only at low wages without any union protection but in precarious jobs fearing in many cases their replacement by robots. But better to have that lousy job than to be unemployed. That is a snapshot of our wonderful world. It is better to be ruthlessly exploited than to be non-exploited but with no job. So things wonderfully go.

There is another misunderstanding that I should counter. I am not arguing out of personal bitterness or personal pain, either physical or psychological, let alone envy. The 1% and their hangers-on trigger in me not envy but disgust, and sometimes some pity for those who have only four Rolexes while some others have five and they are distressed because of this.

I am, as I write this, 87 years old but none of my life was disastrous. Like most people, I went, briefly, through some tough times. But I never suffered badly and never at all for a long term. As a child I was well looked after, no doubt pampered, and comfortable with loving, non-fighting parents.

I was always comfortable though I was a child during the Great Depression. But my parents were prosperous and I grew up with a golden spoon in my mouth. If anything, I was over-indulged. I am not unconsciously taking out a personal bitterness or grudge against the world or against my parents or teachers. I just instead despise our global plutocracies, sometimes veering toward dictatorships with a blessed policy of universal surveillance—what some have called, probably with exaggeration, police states. With what I have seen and read of our global state of affairs, I have come to realize how unnecessarily horrible it is. I despise rather than envy our capitalist rulers.

My near adult and adult life was also not stressful. During World War II I went through the officer school in California for the Merchant Marine. I became a deck cadet midshipman on a Merchant Marine ship in the Pacific during the last part of the Second World War. My experience in service was not traumatic or difficult. I did my first philosophical reading on the ship on which I served: Plato, whom I did not like at all, then Spinoza, Nietzsche, Santayana and Dewey—all of whom I did. At 19, green around the ears, my experience during the war was neither traumatic nor dangerous nor burdensome. I have liked always, since then, seeing more of the world.

My ship was anchored at the island from which the planes that dropped the atom bombs on Japan took off. That did not affect my comfort, but it did affect my attitude. Even in my youth and naiveté, I somehow realized, as the news came in as to what had happened in those atomic attacks, what a horror it was and also how unnecessary it was. Japan, it was apparent to me and to not a few others, even before the atomic attack was already on its knees. There was no justification at all for those bombings. That left a lasting impression on me. I was, of course, glad the war was over but not at that price.

My university student years were pleasant and rewarding. I learned and vastly enjoyed most of my learning and did not suffer the debt burdens that many students do now. I didn't have any debt at all as either an undergraduate or a graduate student.

All my subsequent teaching years (age 27 to 80) in the seven universities in which I taught had environments which, though different, were pleasant and fruitful. I liked teaching, liked my students and for the most part liked my colleagues and the various staff I worked with. I had plenty of time for research, travel and enjoyment. I received various awards and honors. *Personally* I have and had no quarrel or grudge with the world or my situation. But impersonally I have much.

I fear university teaching has become rather different from what I knew and not to its advantage. Universities, even elite ones, are becoming more like corporations. The professoriate with their grants are supposed to bring in money to their universities. They spend too much time trying to get them and with other bureaucratic stuff. With the coming into existence of *lumpen professoriate* teaching huge classes and who benefit from no sabbaticals, very little research time and insecure employment conditions, teaching is a new ballgame now. It is only a minor exaggeration to say that universities are becoming more like businesses with their procedures, factories and rationales. But that came after my time.

I write all this personal autobiographical stuff to make it perfectly clear that I never suffered from a personal grudge, small or great, with the state of the world. I was able to make my own choices with what to do with my life, including my work. Like almost everyone else, I regret some of my choices but they never crushed or embittered me. As my time went on from NYU to my last teaching at Concordia University, I taught just what I wanted to and enjoyed it and found it enhancing and I hope and expect my students did as well. I am, however, not complacent. Rather, I believe that I have been very lucky.

I have not always held the dark view of the world that I have now. But it is not personally dark for me. As I see it, it is very dark for humanity generally, even in the developed world where people (as in the U.S.) can go to jail for ten years for a bounced cheque. And if I live long enough, I will be caught up, as we all will, with the climate change mess and indeed horror. Since I became an adult I have been a socialist, though sometimes a very naïve and mixed up one, but I hope by now and

indeed for a long time not an overly confused one. Certainly I am still not clear enough about these matters. But I was not always as pessimistic and bitter about the state of the world as I am now. When I was first teaching at NYU, I was much more of a social democratic thinking socialist than I am now and not yet moving in a Marxian direction. It was the Vietnam War and the 60s that began to change me and my views since then have deepened and become more nuanced, though not in a conservative direction. I have not become like Lezek Kolakowski or even Tony Judt. Indeed, I am increasingly radical. I thought then (in my early years at NYU) that if we in the United States would only hold on to our hats, the United States, and with it the rest of North America, would in 40 years become more like Sweden. Remember that in those years there were figures in power like Olaf Palme and Sweden was serious about socialism. I was badly mistaken and very overly optimistic in several ways. Sweden is now actually more, as a friend of mine who teaches in Sweden recently (2013) quipped to me, like the United States. I hope and believe that is somewhat of an exaggeration and that what I said earlier in this chapter attests to that, but unfortunately it has *some* verisimilitude at least. Still I do not believe any Swedish parliamentarian, no matter how conservative, would say such a thing as a member of the U.S. Congress said of Obama's shaking the hand of Raul Castro at Mandela's funeral: to wit that that was like shaking the hand of Hitler.

Generally, or at least often, people, ordinary people, are caring people. They don't only care about themselves and their own but they care about others, unless there are some people despised by them as a subgroup (e.g., Blacks, Jews, Moslems, Christians, Whites). But increasingly, most people in most places who have any stability or reasonable wealth and education are not like that. They are neither saints nor utterly selfish. Their caring has its limits, of course, but it is not absent. I do not, that is, for a moment deny that many people of varying political persuasions are caring of others. Reading Ayn Rand on the virtue of selfishness may weaken it but it does not in practice typically obliterate it. As I age, though I have not doubted it before, it becomes more evident to me that people generally care about each other, including about complete strangers. Sometimes politics or war

experiences or racial or ethnic prejudices interfere with it, but you don't have to be a Mandela to overcome that. I recall my grandfather, who fought in the Danish Army in the war with Germany over the Keel Canal, saying to me when I was a little boy that there is nothing he hates like a German. And there is no love lost between Israeli Jews and Palestinians or often between Shiites and Sunnis or the Dinkas and the Nuers and so on. This is not only very unfortunate but often causes great harm; sometimes dreadful harm. The usual thing, however, when things are not so distorted, is mutual caring.

As I now totter around, when I get on a bus people will give me their seats, help me in and out of a door, watch me when I go down the steps, help me in and out of a car, etc., etc. All of this is done spontaneously and without request for help and often by complete strangers. People working at my favorite café bring me things beyond their normal duties. They do not do that expecting some reward. I do not say that all or even perhaps most people are like that. But a lot are. Things like that are not infrequent occurrences. The human race is not made up of people with selfish genes.

Rawls is right: people are neither saints nor sinners and we should not expect them to be. But, as he well realized, they are not usually or even often uncaring indifferentists, let alone normally bastards either. There are a few cheats, thieves, and uncaring brutes around, but they are not typical. Our capitalist orientation enhances selfishness. But few people are thoroughly selfish and looking after only number one, even when they believe that good guys come in last.

As I write this, just a little while ago (November 2013) a hurricane of incredible force raged through the Philippines. In its immediate aftermath, media described what it called looting as having occurred. This, whatever it should be called, does not show selfishness or indifference to others but a desperate survival instinct to save oneself from death. They just saw whole villages reduced to rubble. (We also saw this on our televisions or computer screens.) There was rubble as far as you could see and people entrapped without food, water or shelter just took what they could find to try to save themselves from death. They had nothing to eat or drink, no shelter at all. They did not know

what help, if any, would come and their need was immediate. So they scrounged around in desperation for whatever they could find.

Ask yourself if you would not do what these people in the Philippines did in such a circumstance? It is not right to call that looting. It was not like Kenyan police or soldiers caught on video in Kenya going off with goods when a shopping center in Kenya had been attacked by terrorists and a little later the police and soldiers entered. What they were photographed as doing was plainly looting. The shops had been abandoned and partly destroyed and they were there to help to establish order and instead they made off with some things. But the Philippines case of so-called looting was entirely different. It was an attempt at survival. But it was not even exemplary of the survival of the fittest. In many respects the rubble there was like a garbage dump where starving people pick what they can to in one way or another survive.

Things like this Philippine disaster go on and on, though often in somewhat different ways, when things are violently and suddenly turned upside down. This happens in community after community. Remember the tsunami and subsequent nuclear power station meltdown in wealthy Japan. Blessings like these are becoming an everyday fare on an even reasonably good news outlet. And it is enough to drive one to despair. Think right now (Dec 2013-Jan 2014) of the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. Irrational and inhuman events are happening there that seem to be out of control. Human life in all these places comes cheap. The Nazis didn't invent it and it did not end with their demise (though remember there are still a few neo-Nazis raising their ugly heads). And all of this need not have happened and indeed continues to happen. It is not only brutal but deeply irrational. This does not show that humans are all, or even mostly, either greedy beasts or fanatical beasts, though *some* in powerful positions are either one or the other or both. Again, it is not limited to the powerful but they are the most worrisome here.

Some subject to such enculturation have successfully resisted it or at least partially so. Many of us, we thank our lucky stars, have not been so acculturated. But as we see the greedy beasts and

the fanatical ones (some are both) we, particularly if we are hardnosed and reflective, will say to ourselves, “There by the luck of my genetic and other biological, personal, cultural and social fortune, go I”. This is a grim recognition which is often resisted, and understandably so, but to not recognize this is psychologically evasive. Some may think this is a cosmic incompatibilist determinacy. It is indeed a hard thing to say this, but determinism or not, this is the way it is. There by our good luck go we. It is not something we can non-evasively hold ourselves responsible for, *pace* Dworkin, but we can reasonably be held responsible for it.

Still, though, some very key figures in politics and even more so in corporate life are such greedy beasts and/or fanatics. Most of us are not. Not even all of *them* are. We are neither saints nor moral heroes, but we are not generally or even usually greedy beasts and/or fanatics. Some just are *indifferentists* before what is going on and some others are *quietists*, a few who are sheltered from what is going on, and even a fewer evasively shelter themselves and some just are incapable of facing the music. Many are like those Germans in the Second World War who lived in what they took to be an ‘inner emigration’ and just ‘looked away’ and tried to cultivate their own gardens and after the war didn’t talk about what went on until a few of their children or grandchildren, some going so far as to go into the archives, pushed these things into the light. But this is not a particular German trait. All societies, all peoples, get, often rather easily, into states of denial. Most people live by the maxim “See no evil, hear no evil, and do no evil” and close their eyes and ears to what is going on around them. Where they are forced to do terrible things they will typically do them, as the police and soldiers everywhere usually do what their countries’ law commands or their jobs require—and even when the law is what the Fuhrer says. People who can avoid it still typically remain in a state of denial. Some, of course, do it out of a conviction of my country, right or wrong, but still my country. But most do not. Still, as many a good German went off to fight for Hitler’s dream of empire, so would have many a good American marched off to fight, in one way or another, against what Ronald Reagan pronounced was “the evil empire” and still later what George W. Bush announced as the war on

terrorism where he warned that people are either for us or against us. Such are the ideological chants of the least sophisticated of our wonderful world. Many a good Canadian in the First World War and in the Second World War was marched off to England's drumbeat. In the Second World War they would have been justified but not in the First, and in neither because it was England's drum. But again and again people have marched off to their country's drumbeat. How can we sing, if we have much in the way of knowledge at all, "Oh what a wonderful world"?

Chapter 4: Some Follow-ups

In the previous three chapters I have been introducing some of the delectables, the delicacies, that we have had dished out to us concerning our wonderful world during the last half of the 20th century and the first part of the 21st century. They are sufficient to fill us with joy, a holocaust of events, triggering our everlasting gratitude. But I mostly ignored the wonders of our wonderful first half of the 20th century, most particularly the wonderful times of World War I and the still more wonderful times of World War II and its immediate aftermath of glory. World War I was a stupid, unnecessary horrible bloodbath—Hegel’s slaughter bench—with its horrible useless trench warfare and the gassing of troops on both sides winding up with the war’s end with the vindictive Treaty of Versailles—another stupid act—this time directed against the Germans which may very well in part have engendered the rise and triumph of that marvel of marvels, Nazi power and control and the ruthless drive for a German empire at a murderous cost for many people and including a considerable death cost and cultural cost for the Germans themselves. For Germany it was among other things a loss of what the Weimar Republic represented, a cultural and social high point in Europe. The rise of the Nazis was chorused with the spectacular intensification of anti-Semitism on the German side utterly destroying the cosmopolitanism of the Weimar Republic. But we must remember that anti-Semitism was alive and well all over the Christian world. It was as American as apple pie, though we must also remember it was more virulent in some places than others. As a young boy, I went to Miami with my parents. At the check-in desk I saw in large print on the wall behind the desk, “For Christians Only”. I asked my father what that was for. He replied, “To keep the Jews out.”

The First World War was horror enough. The Second World War made the First World War seem like child’s play. There were massive killings of both soldiers and civilians on both sides and unbelievable flowering of brutal genocide (if that is not pleonastic), perpetrated by the Nazis and

collaborated with by Vichy, though Stalin did a bit of it on his own part as well. The Nazis carried it out with a disgusting ideological campaign and a somewhat effective bureaucratic exactitude with a lot of cogs working the machinery.

The senseless brutal drive to exterminate, to exterminate at all costs, collided with a single-minded determination to win the war and secure their empire: the Thousand Year Reich. It was a war against the Allied Powers. Hitler, particularly in his later years, was also obsessed with attaining a *Juden frei welt*. It actually in effect weakened his war effort by diverting resources to the murder of Jews and Roma that could have been used by the war machine. The German elite, Speer on one side and Goebbels on the other, split here. But Goebbels with Hitler on his side prevailed. The principle effort was to kill as many Jews and Roma as possible, adding a few Communists, before the impending Allied victory. That was fanaticism on spectacular and murderous display. Speer, no friend of the Jews, was smarter than that. But Hitler's command was law. With Speer the people in the concentration camps would have been productively used as slave labor and fed and rested just well enough to keep them in working order so that they would be able, quite against their will, to contribute to the Nazi war effort. When they were worn out, finally worn out, they would be gassed and replaced, if possible with fresh slaves. Murder is accomplished and work goes on full speed ahead. But Hitler with his fanaticism, horrible but also stupid, would have nothing to do with that vile but rational scheme. He with a vile and *irrational* plan would rather go full steam ahead with the slaughter of Jews and Roma even if useful resources were diverted from his war effort.

A crazed and brutal Nazi ideology prevailed and determined the day fueled by the plainly false and utterly unscientific doctrine that there are only two 'pure races': the Jewish race and the German race (sometimes called the Aryan race) and that these races were in conflict, in fact in a deadly conflict or so the Nazis believed. Some of the more informed of them perhaps only pretended to believe that for *realpolitik* propagandistic reasons. 'Decency' in the world, the official propaganda went, required the cleansing of the world of the Jewish race and required the hegemony of the

German race. Indeed, it required the eradication of the Jewish race. However, there is no such thing as the Jewish race or the Germanic race. Jews instead are a widespread and very diverse ethno-religious group with some family resemblances, namely some extensively ritual religious practices but even there that is not complete for there are many utterly secular Jews—so-called non-practicing Jews and some who didn't even know they were regarded as Jews until the Nazis made them aware of that. Similarly, there is no such thing as the Germanic or Aryan race. Germans are again a varied people. All, or almost all, in modern times as well as in earlier times were German language speakers. Not a few do not have or have not had or even aspired to have a home in a German nation or have looked to it as their Mecca or 'chosen nation'. Many have come from Austria, Switzerland, Hungary or the Czech Republic (as it is called now). There also were, and perhaps still are, the *Volga Deutsche* in Central Russia. They originally were a German speaking people, as were the Germans in Southern Wisconsin where the language of the public schools was for a time German. But by now most of them have forgotten it. Similar things were true for the *Volga Deutsche*. After World War II, some of them, even those born and raised in Russia, returned to Germany hardly knowing a word of German. Nonetheless, since they were of German ancestry they were immediately granted German citizenship while the children of foreign, usually Turkish or Bulgarian *gastarbeiter* in Germany born in Germany and fluent in German and attuned to German life and culture, regarding Germany as their homeland and themselves as German, were denied German citizenship. Racism is often deeply rooted. German speakers do not constitute a race any more than English and French speakers in Canada constitute a Canadian race and any more than there is an American race. Most Roma speak a distinct language but they are also not a race. Europe is a continent but there is no European race.

Moreover, the idea of 'a pure race' is a fiction. The Germans are a large and varied ethnic group, a cultural and a linguistic group where migration has often obliterated both the German language and German culture. They, no more than the Jews, make up a race any more than there is a

French race, a Spanish race, a Mohawk race or an Afghan race, Nazi ideology to the contrary notwithstanding.

There were Nazi anthropologists who clearly recognized that, but also recognized the political expediency for Nazis to perpetuate that ideological myth in the German empire's own interests, just as there are U.S. political realists who *inwardly* smile at talk in the United States, common in the political class, of its being the greatest and best democracy in the world, the model for humankind. (Many of their political class would probably say 'mankind'.) And where required, they will chant along as well. Or some Canadian political realists who would discretely laugh at Stephen Harper but still support his policy. Just as some utterly secular people have, again in a minor key, defended some particular religion or perhaps religion generally as a useful and sometimes as even a marvelous mythology. Think here of George Santayana.

Some mythologizing gospel *may* sometimes be useful for some people, but the Nazi racist mythology was not for many and surely not only for Jews, Roma and Bolsheviks. It was not only horrible but utterly devastating. Millions were brutally killed until the end of the Second World War not only in Germany but in non-German speaking countries. At the end of the war, Europe, including European Russia, and on the other side of the world, Japan, lay in ruins with millions killed. The major cities of these countries were in ruins except for Paris and Rome. The Fascists seemed to have sufficient cultural sense to realize their historical significance. But for the rest of the cities they were destroyed—reduced to ruins—by bombing and the people in these regions, including the French and the Italians, in spite of the principal intactness of their capitals, were impoverished. Dresden was even devastatingly bombed by the Allies when it was of no military significance as a city of not only beauty but of hospitals not only for German wounded but sometimes for captive wounded enemy soldiers. The number of people killed, both soldiers and civilians on both sides, was staggering. This was particularly true for the Soviet Union which effectively won the war in the European theater against the Axis powers, but at an incredible cost for them in lives, in loss of superstructures and in

economic development. What were intended as five year plans for economic development for human wellbeing were put on hold to give central emphasis to protecting the Soviet Union and its people from the Nazi threat and to repel and defeat them.

On the European continent the Soviets did the brunt of the fighting to defeat the Nazis and, as I have said, paid tremendously in cost of lives and infrastructure and economic development. The North Americans and the British with the free French, by contrast, held back until the Nazi defeat neared completion. North America, by contrast, did well. With the war effort its economies recovered from the Great Depression and its cities were intact as well as the countryside. It lost comparatively few soldiers and no civilians or soldiers who remained at home. With the economy buzzing it did well. North America profited from World War II and business boomed for the U.S. and Canadian industries and their populations had better times. It was, for them, though of course it was not trumpeted as such, indeed a lovely war revealing how wonderful our world was. But Europe and Japan were devastated. The 20th century outdid itself in wonderfulness, adding zest to the rest. After the war, the recovery in Germany and Japan was rapid with American help but slower with America's allies. For the U.S. and Canada, there was no need for recovery. They never experienced the wartime horrors. Still, for some it was oh such a lovely war in a wonderful world. The Depression was over and everything was booming. Happy times were here again.

Chapter 5: A Petit Afterword

Toward the end of a draft of this little book (in January 2014) I was reminded of a great Afro-American poet Amiri Baraka. *Democracy Now!* had a full program on him two days after his death at 79. The program was excellent, with people who knew him well commenting, including two fellow poets and his biographer. He was not only a poet but a very effective and intense political activist and, as well, besides being a poet, his activism was often integrated with his poetry, into jazz, hip hop and, if I am not mistaken, rap. But at the same time he was a very knowledgeable person with wide human interests. Baraka not only knew the poetry of a great range of poets, but he knew his history, including world history and he came to know and attune with Marx and Marxism very well and its use by African liberation leaders in a rapidly decolonizing Africa. That evening on *Democracy Now!*, we had extensive passages of him reading his poems passionately and effectively and interspersed with effective revolutionary singing. He was up to his neck in political activity for the liberation of blacks which would carry along with it their empowerment. As a black person Baraka was very concerned with this, but he was not concerned with black persons alone or concerned to give blacks primacy as whites did for themselves at the expense of people of color, giving blacks vicious clouts from the time of slavery on. Native Americans, though in different but equally vicious ways, did not fare so well either. Baraka made close alliances with the Puerto Rican community in what had become his hometown in Newark, New Jersey and he resonated with and supported the Native communities of America and the poor, deprived, exploited, powerless people everywhere, including whites. Black Power for him didn't mean or entitle or aid anti-white power; it was rather, and rightly, directed at disempowering racism of all kinds. There wasn't a racist streak in him in spite of how propaganda portrayed him. The American establishment didn't like Communists or other Leftists, black or white.

Baraka's Marxism deepened. It led him to robust democracy, to socialism and finally even to communism. There he and I have a family resemblance. Malcolm X had a powerful impact on him early on, but he developed his political activism in his own way. He was crucial in what he called the Newark Rebellion which he insisted on calling a rebellion and not a riot as the media had it and I suppose he would also so characterize the Watts, Detroit and Los Angeles uprisings, or what the media and most people called riots. They all were uprisings, fighting for black empowerment against a white brutal and uncaring domination. During the Newark Rebellion he was almost beaten to death by the Newark police, only to be rescued by his comrades. He was a major and charismatic figure in the black liberation movement.

Why do I write of Baraka particularly here? I will explain. First and simply, he lists powerfully and concretely, and specifically portrays, many of the dreadful wonders of our wonderful world that I have stressed. And more as well and more tellingly. Secondly, and much more importantly, he reads and sings his recordings in which such listings occur very effectively in ways that have a powerful effect on his audience. It is not just the plain telling that some others give and I give here in an ironical and sometimes sardonic manner. It gets to people or at least some people in a way that my work and the work of some other public intellectuals typically does not and cannot with our way of doing things. While our beliefs are much the same as Baraka's, our ways of presenting them are very different. I came to realize Baraka's way of doing things gets through to people and transforms people in a way mine don't. So as we both want very much to transform people and the world, focusing on *much* the same people, should I go his way? Should others? Yes, for lots of people. He has a far greater outreach than I and other writers have or could have. And that is not just that Baraka's way can whip people up. Hitler and "The Great Communicator" Reagan could, though in different ways, whip people up too, though Reagan would and did put some people to sleep. Reagan himself was prone to sleep at conference meetings. But in a cool hour, after people had been whipped up, when they reflected would their beliefs be sustained and strengthened? It is not enough to be

swayed by oration but to recognize the plain and important truth of what has been said. This also is crucial.

It is indeed crucially important that there are people like Amiri Baraka and it is a very good thing that there are many articulate followers—people who have been influenced by him. In contrast to Baraka, I am small potatoes. But take instead, for contrast, Noam Chomsky. He, as did Baraka, has a very considerable following and has influenced many people, including me. In a very different way he has charisma, too. Again, his effect is lasting. Moreover, both are firmly, informedly, intelligently and passionately on the Left, though Chomsky's manner is cool. But otherwise Baraka and Chomsky are very different. I have always been much in the Chomskyan mold, though with this little book I write in a style that is neither Chomskyan nor for the most part philosophical or standardly academic or Barakaian.

Moreover and differently, Baraka is not like Nelson Mandela during his years on Robben Island and when he was the key player in the successful rebellion against political and social apartheid. The Mandela of that time and Baraka are substantively alike. But Mandela and Baraka are not alike in their rhetorical manner. Mandela's manner is that of a straight stick (though a wonderful one) in a way that Baraka is certainly not. Later, after Mandela's experience at Davos, they diverged. Fortunately Baraka, with his firmer and more informed Marxist orientation, never became, as Mandela did after his visit to Davos, a captive of neo-liberalism and its *laissez-faire* economic orientation. Baraka never even went in the direction of a decent liberalism of a Millian, Deweyan and Rawlsian type. (Remember that Mill and Rawls regarded themselves as liberal socialists.) Mandela, when he was the first leader of post-apartheid South Africa, something he was a key in bringing about, eventually developed in a liberal way with a Millian intent but with unfortunately an incompatible neo-liberal dangler. That came after his Davos encounter. When the apartheid South African regime fell, 87% of the private land was owned by whites; now in 2014 that has fallen only to 80% with little increase of public-owned land. Many on the Left in South Africa say we now need an economic de-

apartheid revolution to go with the political one. One person, one vote, with every adult person allowed to vote is not enough. We must in some way rectify that to end the plutocracy in nations, including South Africa, which we traditionally call and typically recognize as model democracies; countries that in reality are not democracies. They are rather plutocracies and some of them vicious ones. They are not only in South Africa but also in some European nations and always in the most powerful ones as well as in the North American nations. The United States may be the greatest plutocracy in the world, but it is certainly not the greatest democracy in the world or even a genuine democracy. One cannot be a democracy and a plutocracy at the same time. And the United States is certainly a plutocracy.

We must also come to realize that people and peoples are different and are deeply influenced by their culture. I do not say all the way down in their particular circumstances such that people attuned to Chomsky and to his way of thinking and doing are not the same in any significant respect as those attuned to Baraka. Chomsky's attunes are largely university students and some of their professors and some progressive elites more generally. Sometimes such people are attuned to Baraka as well. But *some* of the Chomsky bunch are not. (I do not say this in a disparaging way at all.) But Baraka appeals to even a larger swath of people than Chomsky and probably Mandela appeals to even a larger swatch of people than either Baraka or Chomsky. But Mandela (or at least the pre-Davos Mandela), Chomsky or Baraka do not appeal to the standard neo-liberal types in business or in the university and nor, of course, do they appeal to conservatives, though some conservatives may now pay lip service to Mandela, though most did not when he was on Reagan's terrorist list.

However, even among progressive liberals, ones who are Deweyan-Rawlsian-Dworkinian type liberals (and there are relatively important differences here) and Chomskyan type progressives and Baraka type progressives, there are important differences. The latter two can readily agree on

practical political and social matters and march to the same drum, but their methods may set them apart.

When several years ago at a conference where I first heard Cornell West, someone who has *something* of the manner of Baraka, I thought *then* 'What a clown' with his preacherly style and all his brothers and sisters blathering. When I read him later, several years later, I realized that I was very much mistaken. West has a solid substance that I am very much attuned to and am in accord with, though his style is certainly not my style nor is it my cup of tea. I realized, as I came to realize with Baraka, that what I took to be all that schmaltzy sound and rhetoric was not that at all but a way of communicating with people differently acculturated than I am and that that indeed as a manner of speech has a greater outreach than mine or even Chomsky's. It indeed has a far greater outreach than mine or Chomsky's. *But it is vital to realize that it is all in and for the same cause.* We are all marching to the same drum.

It is the manner, not the matter, that stultifies one or another of us. (Perhaps hopefully there are some who are stultified by neither?) But it is important to realize and take to heart and to heed that what stultifies some does not stultify others and vice versa. We can and should be tolerant and relativist about such matters. In music it is from plain chant to Bach and Mahler that I am attuned, not to hip hop or rap which sounds to me like unpleasant noise and not music. *Sometimes* when I can make out some of the rapid fire words of rap, I realize it says some good political things but usually it does not and most of it I cannot make out anyway. Some jazz I like. Other jazz seems to me like verbose sentimentality. "Oh, what a wonderful world" certainly is. And a preacherly style such as practiced by Baraka and West is to my ears annoying, though less so by Baraka. But with such crucial aims in common to us, let many flowers bloom. Indeed let us encourage their blooming. This is particularly to be acknowledged and practiced where a given manner aids the attainment of a liberated and emancipated society, such as does both Baraka's and West's.

Moreover, after all, it is good, what it sounds like aside (what to me sounds like *schmaltz*: talk about our dear brothers and sisters), and very much on the mark. It is, of course, hyperbole but we use again and again hyperbole for various purposes that often are very useful and without causing no conceptual trouble. Our language is full of hyperboles as well as metaphors and usefully so; sometimes unconsciously so. What is at issue with the people I have been talking about—Baraka, Chomsky, West—is human wellbeing. Indeed, the wellbeing of everyone and achieving that as widely as possible and as fully as possible for each human. No one is to be regarded as expendable and as second class. This, of course, is an ideal; perhaps our most foremost ideal. We are indeed very far from it. But there is no mystery about what is ideally to be achieved and what would count as moving in that direction even if only marginally. The thing is to move in that direction, to make life better for people, as many people as possible. Again, there is no mystery here about *some* of the key measures to be taken: for example, better health care, good education, clean and comfortable housing, clean drinking water in sufficient amounts, an end to killing, secure and decent employment, a caring atmosphere, etc., etc. Don't expect the "etc., etc." to ever close. It never will. That is a dream of some philosophers. But even without closure we are still on solid ground here.

I am not recommending or even acknowledging relativism in any of its forms. But I am not denying it either in all its forms. Judgments about some forms of music or visual art, for instance, are often particularly difficult and problematic and sometimes perhaps impossible as well as often unnecessary to make with any secure objectivity. This is not always so, but there are clear cases where this is obviously so. But the treatment of girls in some considerable parts of the world where female circumcision is practiced is far worse than is the treatment of girls where it is not practiced. More generally, the treatment of females in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia is far worse than in Iceland, Finland, Denmark or the Netherlands. That is plainly evident as it is evident that the treatment of prisoners and the conditions of prisons are far worse in the United States or Russia than in Norway. However, to settle issues of relativism over such matters as *may* arise in this paragraph

is very different from the possible repercussions of the issues I have been concerned with in the body of this book and particularly in the previous paragraph. To argue as I have that we need not, and indeed should not, weigh in on such possible relativistic issues at all is on the mark. We do well there to bypass such issues and we can do so without loss. For whatever side we take about relativism there, it need not have any influence on the issues at hand in this book. The same goes for philosophical skepticism.

In closing, a brief note about this *petit* afterword itself. This *petit* afterword does not take away from the main thrust of this short volume which is to depict our wonderful world with its multiple and varied miseries, wonders that for the most part need not happen but do so in abundance in a world with very considerable productive capacity, a capacity if not to make it a truly wonderful world at least to make a decent human world for all. But nothing like this is on the agenda of our crucial masters of power in our world; not in the United States, China, Russia or the European community or in the wealthy Asian states do we find a push toward human decency for all. Do we find anything like a wonderful world? The thing is to put it on the table and produce a truly human life for all. Perhaps we can gain only an approximation. Let us at least start with that but not be satisfied with ending with it.*

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