PEGASUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



Pegasus

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Introduction

In this month's *Pegasus*, we have two essays that take deep dives into civilization. They grapple with some similar themes, chief among them the agency of humans as creators or destroyers of civilization. The two essays also share a concept that knowledge and learning can lead to good things or dark things, depending on how people engage these ideas.

In *The Good Life and Civilization: An Analysis*, Michael Hartoonian writes about the challenges of building civilization, but holds out that the proper establishment of civilization, especially as it relates to knowledge and intelligence, can provide for the good life. But it's not easy. Such "questions are complicated because our comprehension of both ourselves and the world appears to be largely grounded in beliefs rather than concrete knowledge."

That said, the ingredients of civilization are right at hand. We have many great thinkers who have shared positive views of knowledge about how to structure a civilized society. Sometimes, we grab these ideas and expand them in enriching ways. Other times, leaders may twist them to ends that don't merit the term "civilized." Others hearken to a long ago past, to their peril. "A contemporary nation that makes a claim of being civilized, based on cherry-picking ancient historical fruit, is engaging in fantasy."

Michael adds that it takes more than one to make a civilized society. "Becoming an adult means living with all the responsibilities and privileges expected and due to those who understand that life and particularly, civilized (good) life, is a team sport."

He also lays out a list of institutional attributes that "complement the activities of the good life."

Toward his conclusion, Michael says "War, poverty, discrimination and ignorance are consequences of a lack of civilization and intellectual effort. Instead, happiness is a quality of being that inspires those of integrity and character to follow its example."

Next, Steve Young takes Michael's concepts and applies them to tools. Indeed, humans have long improved on tools, often for good, but also for greater prowess in killing during war. "From the beginning, humans invented tools and put them to use. Our progenitors – the great apes – did not invent tools. What a difference tools made back then – setting us humans on our way."

The value of human-designed tools is evident. Combined with capitalistic ideas in the 1600s, tools contributed mightily to an explosion in global GDP. The chart shared in the piece nicely illustrates how ideas intersected with tools to enrich the world on a breath-taking scale.

That said, tools are not good in and of themselves. "With tools, we need to have ethics in our minds as we put them to work. Tools should be used with due care, non-negligently."

In our current construct and stretching back some centuries, money has become a valuable tool, too. "And with money – more trade, production of goods to sell and services to perform."

Like Michael, Steve argues that tools require knowledge and ethical consideration in order to build strong civilizations. "We might even say that we ourselves, each of us, is a living instrument – a tool – with potential to make things better and more beautiful."

As ever, we welcome your feedback and hope you enjoy these two insightful essays of great relevance in these challenging times.

Dave Kansas Editor-at-Large Pegasus

The Good Life and Civilization: An Analysis

Michael Hartoonian

I slept and dreamt
That life was joy
I awoke and saw
That life was duty.
I acted and behold
Duty was joy.
— Rabindranath Tagore

Introduction

What does it mean to live a good life? Is the question personal, meaning that each individual can decide what "good" means? Is there any connection between living a good life and living in civilization? Who can claim a relationship with civilization and by what standards?

These questions are complicated because our comprehension of both ourselves and the world appears to be largely grounded in beliefs rather than concrete knowledge. If this is the case, we must consider the possibility that our definitions of the relationships between civilization and human dignity, as well as between living a good and meaningful life and the development of human and social capital, might be incorrect. We will examine a few contradictory assumptions and attending value tensions that may provide greater clarity on this matter and assist us in formulating a more effective definition of civilization, grounded in the conception of the good life.

Assumptions:

- A state is not necessarily a civilization.
- A civilization is not a noun, but a verb.
- A contemporary community or country has no moral claim on a bygone civilization.
- As a verb, a civilization never is, so much as it is to be.
- A good life is necessary to a dynamic civilization, as both share the same attribute of creating universal human and social capital (wealth).

The Claim of Being Civilized

Being civilized can be defined as being in complex, dynamic relationships within a web or system of connections, to entities such as deity, spouse, children, land, community, business, etc., and to oneself as a reflective individual. For a community to become a civilization comprised of individuals who are (considered) civilized, it is important for those people

to understand the evolution of maturity – from childhood to adulthood. Civilization is incompatible with childhood because maturity involves recognizing that self-interest must develop from a context where individuals act (have agency) with the understanding that their own self-interest is best served when the self-interest of others is also considered. Selfishness or childish behavior disrupts harmony within and between communities and this disharmony truncates civilization, claiming the contrary notwithstanding.

A contemporary nation that makes a claim of being civilized, based on cherry-picking ancient historical fruit, is engaging in fantasy. It would be like trying to make a fresh salad out of rotten fruit and vegetables. All you do is make people sick. That sickness is manifested in the unhealthy state of people around the world – obesity, drug abuse, heart disease, depression, ignorance, self-indulgence, style above character, etc. Of course, the true manifestation of cultural immaturity is the fact that we have children "leading" the world's most powerful nations and economies. As many have said, "Oh, it would be nice to have an adult in the room." But how do you achieve adulthood? Civilization?

Achieving a state of civilization is certainly not just imagining bygone empires or "civilizations." Again, civilized and adulthood takes deep awareness. It is a renaissance and an enlightenment, tied most closely to the Scottish Enlightenment and the writings of Adam Smith (moral sentiments), David Hume (empiricism only works with a trained eye), Francis Hutcheson (science is a foolish trick without ethical foundations - echoed by Einstein almost 300 years later) and Thomas Reid (who influenced Jefferson in writing the Declaration of Independence, with the concept of *public* happiness and John Adams, with the concept of the necessity of virtuous people). These ideas help us to understand the best of the past is witnessing the agency of a loving critic – of self and community. Becoming an adult means living with all the responsibilities and privileges expected and due to those who understand that life and particularly, civilized (good) life, is a team sport. That is, you help and work together to enrich the lives of everyone, so your life is enriched. Winning respect and joy are a function of loving each other, the perfection of your craft and the ability to embrace high (moral) purpose. Without this understanding, even education is impotent. The primary reason that education may no longer be purposeful is the fact that we have become a planet of older children with little interest in learning, in living a good life or becoming adults. The purpose of education should be to create adults from children. However, becoming an adult is not necessarily aligned with the desires of those who are unwell or uninformed. We should come to the realization that children can never build a civilization, much less claim one, because civilization is counterintuitive to the mind of a child. Many "scholars," from Marx and Engels, to Mikhail Bakunin and the Luddites of the 19th century and to Nietzsche, all brought confusion to the work of creating a harmonious community by not understanding what it means to be human or simply trying to be intellectually clever. And the onslaught against civilization continued into 20th century arguments about emotionally isolated and lonely individuals and with the post-modernists painting humans as weak-minded people who should, non-the-less, create their own individual life's meaning and behavior by suggesting that reality is a personal construct. Welcome to Alice Through the Looking

Glass. All of this "research" is relatively new.

Looking back even 80 years and examining world leadership from 1945 to 1990, it reveals that many leaders had WWII experience. This background contributed to their appreciation of liberal arts, maturity, teamwork and civic service – traits vital for sustaining civilization.

Have we truncated our character in exchange for personal amusement? With character's destruction, have we any chance for living a good life?

The Good Life

What is a good life? How can research and virtue help us explore the question? Does life have a point? Or is life simply random and fatalistic?

The following discussion is based on the literature of philosophy, religion, history, art, science and psychology. We will explore the ideas of Aristotle, Confucius, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Mary Ainsworth and Larry Kohlberg, among others. Since learning how to live a meaningful and happy adult life starts early in life, attention should be given to how children develop adult attributes of intellectual and virtuous excellence.

We aim to define below the characteristics of a good life and its connection to civilization. Good life aligns with human nature, encompassing rational, aesthetic and moral pursuits. These values are essential for a disciplined, dutiful and joyful life. The claim here is that (good) life has a point, at least to the rational, aesthetic and moral adult. The examined life and civilization are interdependent. Each defines the other. Civilization gives meaning to living a good life and a good life, in turn, necessitates civilization. Neither can exist alone. Essentially, both civilization and the good life require each other to be understood and realized. This notion is not like the connection between citizen and democracy (republic). One can only be an enlightened citizen within a democracy. And a democracy cannot exist absent enlightened citizens.

The good life is inherently connected to the well-being of society. The ancient Greeks believed that achieving a harmonious life in isolation – outside the community (polis) – was not possible. The attributes of being civilized are viewed as a set of interacting activities and understandings, where each one contributes to the whole, making the entirety greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, all of the following create a synergy only when practiced together:

- -A contemplative life, where time is given over to reading and discussing important ideas of life and where self-reflection becomes automatic.
- -A life of action, where activities are meaningful, difficult, involve others and serve a public and civic purpose.

- -A fatalistic life, where knowing that there is much risk and luck in living, yet still doing what is right and good and coming to grips with failure.
- -A hedonistic life, where the trade-off between pain and pleasure is calculated and one understands that the desires of comfort and security are better served through delayed gratification.
- -A hero's life, where a happy and flourishing existence is defined in service to others and realizing that duty is joy.
- -A life where you know that children learn virtue by observing, mimicking and being guided by adults.
- -A life where civic and business leaders establish a moral context for governance and commerce.

The attributes above provide a good start and open the door to understanding civilization as an ongoing debate among people who hold such qualities.

Civilization as Human Construct

Civilization is a complex human system that relies on principles of human flourishing, not just architecture, music or science. Buildings and other artifacts may last. They make interesting history, but civilization is a verb and exists only in a contemporary context when people uphold ethical and intellectual principles of human systems. Think about the differences between building a bird house and performing a dance. The bird house will last for a time, serving a purpose and adding a touch of interest to your back yard. It will, in time, become an artifact. A dance, on the other hand, constructed of rhythm, melodies, steps and cadence, is consumed in the act of the dance. The relationships of music, beat and dancer come together to form a moment in time. To dance, in this context, is a verb, a beautiful action of refined elements, the stuff of civilization. It is a flowing river, whose water can only be stepped in once, unless and until those behaviors of beauty and excellence can be relearned and practiced. If not, you are deluding yourself and all who choose to listen to the confusion between a measurable present concept and a disclosure or revealed concept of the past. Epistemologically and ontologically, this is illogical and throws away knowledge for the sake of some fabricated ideology. Following is a partial list of institutionalized attributes that complement the activities of the good life. The reader will see needed human qualities in these behavioral systems and can add or subtract as context and geography might suggest:

- Reciprocal duty or trans-generational moral responsibility.
- Learning, education.
- Cooperation. That is, understanding that life is a team sport.
- Respect for law and voluntary compliance with majority rule, with minority rights.
- Imagination, innovation and critical thinking.

- An aesthetic sense of life and meaning.
- Empathy and properly understood self-interest.
- Identity and collective memory, while embracing the role of being a loving critic of society.
- Self-discipline and self-responsibility. That is, individuals will not delegate an ethical decision.

These defining human qualities of civilization may differ depending on the historical period and the religion, philosophy and literacy rates. But the concept of civilization is diminished with each missing attribute.

Civilization: An Open System of Thought

In 1942, Harvard published a book by Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*. It was a deep dive into the role of symbolism in reason and how we are seduced by objects of art and ritual practices. To me, her irresistible idea was the proposition that every cultural epoch is defined by its questions and a philosophic epoch ends when generative ideas are no longer raised and we engage in philosophizing. All people turn to the collective symbols of their past as the unexamined truth and refuse to see what's behind the artifacts and language. Never asked is a question like: what is really there? For example, to argue about the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin and to not ask questions about deeper, hidden meanings, is just busy work.

Langer: The end of a philosophical epoch comes with the exhaustion of its motive (value) concepts. When all answerable questions that can be formulated in its terms have been exploited, we are left with only those problems that are sometimes called metaphysical in slurring sense – insoluble problems whose very statement harbors a paradox. The peculiarity of such pseudo-questions is that they are capable of two or more equally good answers, which defeat each other. An answer once propounded wins a certain number of adherents who subscribe to it despite the fact that other people have shown conclusively how wrong or inadequate it is; since its rival solutions suffer from the same defect, a choice among them really rests on temperamental grounds they are not intellectual discoveries, like good answers to appropriate questions, but doctrines.

The Lamp of History

I'm always intrigued by the way people use history to claim a tactical advantage in arguments. These claims refuse to address or understand the problem of knowledge and how we come to know. Taking a selected bit of recent history and using that information to make a claim for being civilized, for example, is not only silly, but shows a lack of understanding of historiography and its purpose. Its purpose or point is to illuminate the whole of what it means to be human, with all the faults, tragedies, triumphs and more. History, when

understood, can help us deal with problems of knowledge, conduct and governance. And if we let the mind work awhile, we see that the lamp of history is a universal light. It's a way toward understanding the deep and winding journey that defines all of us. Claiming a specific past (time) as a base period for any civilization is illogical and foolish. What time period would you pick to claim civilization for the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K., Japan or Germany? As you can see, it's a fool's journey. How about Russia in the 9th century – a Viking colony. Or how about the 1930s at the time of Stalin's genocide? What time periods would you pick for Japan, China, the U.S.? To understand who we are, we take all of history or none. Claims to the contrary turn off the lamp of history and are dangerous to life itself. Unless, of course, you just want to play at history, adding and subtracting as you please and ending up with nonsense. The lack of historical understanding among world leaders today is breathtaking. With these people in charge, and if we choose to follow them, we will never learn how to conduct civic, civil and civilized lives. We will all be (are) living form hand to mouth.

Why War, Poverty and Ignorance?

Those who believe that wars are caused by hatred have never been to war. Those who believe that poverty is a function of the human bell curve know nothing about being human. These are the same people who confuse the meaning of love with hate and poverty with character flaws. The real question illuminated by history is not why we go to war, but "What kind of person am I?" "What kind of people are we?" Wars are fought not because of hatred, but over clashes of values brought about by incompetent discourse, speech we would call propaganda. The uneducated mind is easily fooled and amoral leaders have made the most of this fact. Some of these leaders actually say, "I like dumb people."

Selective interpretations of history serve as propaganda. A comprehensive study of history, on the other hand, enables us to better understand ourselves as individuals and fosters the ability to build harmonious relationships within society. This is not limited to the histories of any one nation, such as Russia or the U.S. Through disciplined, historical inquiry, we deepen our self-awareness. Historiography provides an essential framework for understanding human nature and societal development. The problem of knowledge must be addressed before we can understand human conduct, writ large.

Discipline, Freedom and a Good Life: What's AI Got to Do with It?

During a trip to Japan, I discussed how one might live an ethical life with a philosopher who wrote about transparency and illumination. We talked about how vision and virtue were linked in ancient Greece and how illuminating our shared humanity helps guide our actions. She said that there are two lights that guide and shape us: our cultural history and the influence of future generations. Judging our actions from these perspectives help define goodness, that is, being accountable in these illuminations, even though the light from the future is faint.

As we talked, I wondered if AI could aid our ethical choices, but she argued that true ethics require personal accomplishment rather than relying on artificial assistance, which would undermine genuine human dignity and achievement.

"Let's consider your light from the future," I said. "The concept that character influences outcomes appear consistently across various cultures. Trend data is also used to provide insights into future developments. Artificial intelligence has the potential to help define the patterns of human history and current societal conditions, offering a perspective on prevailing ethical standards and the likelihood of moral communities emerging. With this information, would it not be possible to both construct and more deeply understand civilizations as ongoing developments?"

Can AI help clarify the link between civilization and ethical living going forward? I think it can because it will provide a larger harvest of historical information, but these data will only find utility in the hands of scholars who understand the problems of knowledge.

Conclusion

If the world's best minds have suggested a way to live a good life in civilization, why has human kind failed so miserably?

War, poverty, discrimination and ignorance are consequences of a lack of civilization and intellectual effort. Addressing these issues requires active solutions, some of which I've outlined above. I'll conclude with a story about happiness to bring these points together.

While philosophers have debated the meaning of words and life, they seem unanimous on suggesting that one of the highest achievements in living is to approach happiness – to die a happy person.

There's a story in Herodotus' *The Persian Wars* about a meeting between Croesus, the riches of men, and Solon, the wisest of men. The story is not historical, but included in the text, perhaps to help us understand happiness as a problem of conduct. Again, the problems of conduct, knowledge and governance must be addressed before civilization or the good life can be realized or before what is universally defined as a harmonious or happy life.

At this meeting, the story goes, Croesus asks Solon if you could say who is the happiest of men, believing that because of this wealth, Solon would say – "You are." But he doesn't. Instead, Solon tells Croesus that the happiest of men where two young brothers, Cleobis and Biton.

It seems that their mother, a temple priestess, would be late to the house of worship, but the horses that usually pulled her carriage where nowhere to be found. So, the two brothers decided to pull the carriage themselves so their mother would be on time for the services. The trip was more than three miles over rough terrain and in great heat, but they ran as hard

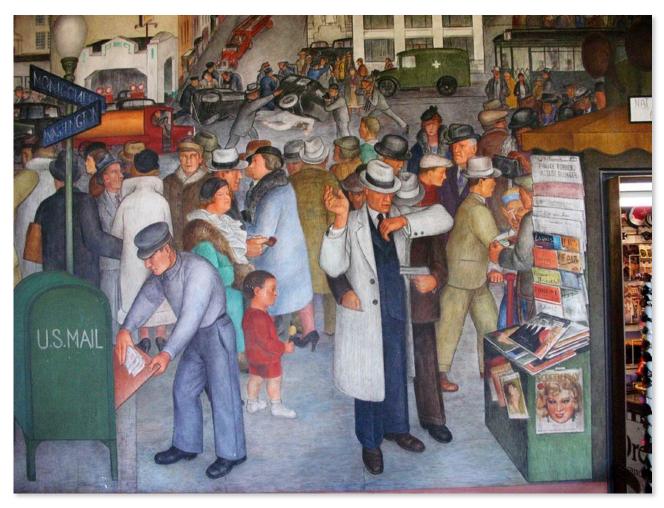
as they could over that distance, their feet bleeding as they arrived at the temple, but their mother was on time. Now, so fatigued, the brothers rested under a tree.

Cleobis and Biton were beautiful young men, beloved by their family and respected by neighbors and strangers alike. Always willing to help others and with good cheer. Their mother was so proud of them and loved them so much that she prayed that they would die the happiness of men. Outside the temple, exhausted, but feeling good after their long and hard journey, the brothers fall asleep and died – the happiness of men.

You might ask: what does this story have to do with the good life and civilization?

Happiness, a fulfilling life and the advancement of civilization are not achieved through material wealth, possessions, recognition or extraordinary actions. Instead, happiness is a quality of being that inspires those of integrity and character to follow its example. Such a life will inspire posterity to think reflectively upon another's conduct and wish to live with such virtue. Most of recorded history focuses on war and conflict as ways to inform character. In the story of Cleobis and Biton, Herodotus gives us an alternative and better way to form character, civilization and live the good life.

Michael Hartoonian is Associate Editor of Pegasus.



Tools Make the Human

Stephen B. Young

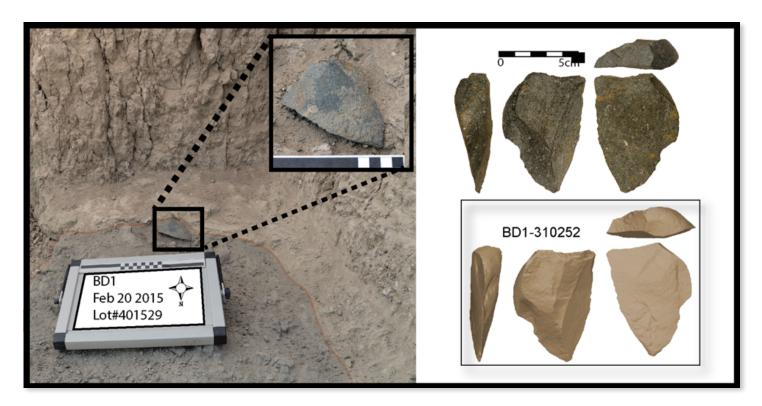
Our world is growing less humane – 100,000 Russians killed or wounded in a war of aggression; two Abrahamic religious traditions killing each other; global trade descending into a "beggar my neighbor" competition of self-assertions; immigrants resisting assimilation into host communities; social media de-sensitizing teenagers and young adults and compromising their emotional maturity. And there is environmental degradation.

How is all this possible?

Tools.

From the beginning, humans invented tools and put them to use. Our progenitors – the great apes – did not invent tools. What a difference tools made back then – setting us humans on our way.

Tools made 2.6 million years ago:



Old axes:



40,000 year old flute:



Woven cloth from Çatalhöyük in Turkey, some 8000-9000 years ago:



Bronze age pots I discovered in Ban Chiang, Thailand in 1966 by tripping on a tree root and falling on my face on the ground. Ban Chiang is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site:



Bronze weapons and jewelry were found at Ban Chiang, as well:





The tools we make empower us to change the world. Iron hoes for farming. Sails to catch the wind and take us over oceans. The axe, the hammer, the saw. Artificial intelligence for mastering knowledge. Computers to guide spacecraft to Mars and beyond.

Farming, hunting, cooking, covering our nakedness, building houses, writing and reading: using tools created new realities. That is what our species has done. We are still using tools, inventing tools, to create new realities – Teslas, air fryers, LED bulbs, solar panels.

Tools give power outside of nature. We make them. Nature doesn't. Tools obey those who use them. So, when tools give us power, are we good stewards of those powers? What happens to us when we hold a tool? What choices do we make? What work do we initiate? And when the job is done, are we proud of our accomplishment? We decide how to use the tool and to what end.

With tools, we need to have ethics in our minds as we put them to work. Tools should be used with due care, non-negligently.

The use of tools demands design thinking – what should we make? How can we make that which is both useful and pleasing to the eye? With creation, we learned about proportion, about complementarity, about intersections and integration.

With instruments to make marks – cuneiform on clay tablets, for example – or to paint other marks – characters or letters – words – language – religious texts – laws – became the basis for civilization. For accumulating corpus of thoughts, for recording history, writing poetry, which inspired and taught our descendants to be better than they otherwise would have been.

Tools permitted measurement and so open the door to mathematics and science. No microscopes, no telescopes – no intimate knowledge of our world and our solar system.

Tools also made it easier to kill and fight wars.

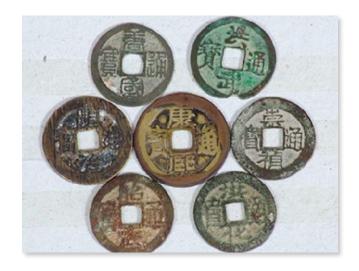
Tools gave rise to wealth and so to social inequalities. Some clothes were more desirable than others. Some temples were bigger than others. Elites profited most from what tools could let us achieve.

And some made more money than others. Money is only a tool – a "thing" we invent and use. However, money is a tool that has power over us. With money, we can lose control of our ethics and we can try to design unreasonable, disproportionate outcomes.

"The oldest coin available today was discovered in Efesos, an ancient Hellenic city and prosperous trading center on the coast of Asia Minor. The 1/6 stater, pictured below, is more than 2,700 years old, making it one of the very earliest coins. Made from electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver, the coin originated in the area of Lydia." (Wikipedia)



Chinese metal coins:



Cowrie shells used as money:



Ancient Chinese imitation cowrie shells used as money:



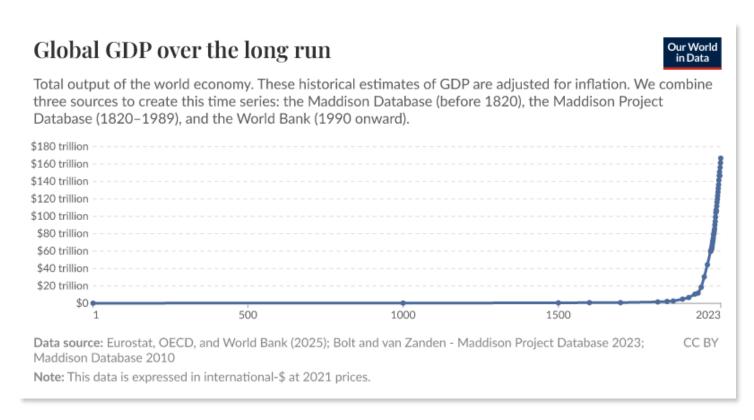
Wampum shells as money:



Oldest extant paper money – from China:



And with money – more trade, production of goods to sell and services to perform. Better living and starting in the 1600s – capitalism.



Now we have money you can't touch or even see – crypto currencies. This money depends on faith; it has no material substance. It is a tool that has become completely mental, a social construct. But not quite. Crypto needs computers as a tool to make it and then provide a safe place to store it.

But does not the mind control the making of tools and the using of tools?

So, if the mind is in charge of what substantially makes us human, the mind makes decisions about tools. The mind has the power of choice – to make or not to make; to use or not to use; to kill or not to kill.

Ethics, morality, culture and socialization inhabit the mind. To live well, we should think very seriously about living rightly. But rightly according to whose mind?

Tools and the mind working together with inspiration and God-like thinking brought us the city and cities – Athens, Rome, Babylon, Memphis and Thebes, Nineva and Tyre, Xian, Mohenjo Daro – "civilized" us.

The New Testament gave us the ambition of building – using all our tools, including the mental ones of ethics, morality and good character – to build a "city upon a hill" that all the world might admire and want to imitate.

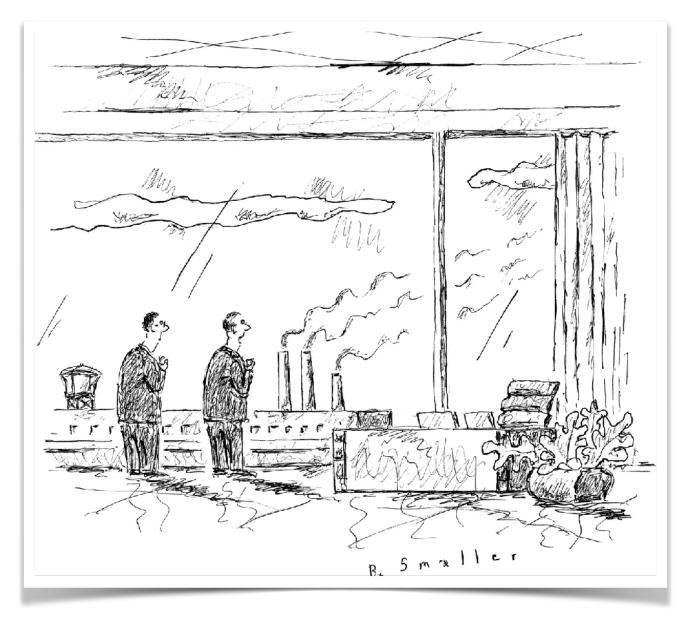
We can then think of ourselves, first and foremost, as creators, as Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, "co-creators" with God of the spaces in which we live now and which we pass on to our descendants until the end of time. As creators, we have work to do with our hands and our minds, with our decisions, with our relationships, with our words and with our money. We humans have vocations in a religious sense – meaning and purpose over and above – outside the parameters of the animal kingdom. We are called to use our tools well, with skill, good intentions, pleasing aesthetics and for good. That is who we are meant to be.

So, let us put to very good use the tools of our mind. Let us hone them, polish them so that they shine before others and give pride to ourselves, evolve them to become better and better – maybe even from time to time creating new tools making for more exciting – or more evil – accomplishments. But we must not forget art and aesthetics – the ear for music, the eye that sees beauty, the sixth sense that decerns what is thought by others, but not voiced.

We might even say that we ourselves, each of us, is a living instrument – a tool – with potential to make things better and more beautiful. We ourselves and no one else make culture, society, politics, economics – history. So, living we might call justice.

As Mark Twain quipped: "Let us endeavor to live well so that when we die, even the undertaker will be sorry."

Stephen B. Young is Global Executive Director of the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.



"True, only God can make a tree, but only man can make it into a cardboard box."



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