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PORTAL, SYSTEM, SACRED ORDER: AMERICA

Peter Murphy

CIVILIZATION AND THE WEST

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States emerged as a world power. One of the steps that it took, to prepare itself for this role, was to embrace the idea of Western Civilization.[1] For a time, it seemed as if this might serve as a postulate for America's new global ambitions and responsibilities. Western Civilization was a grand, but vague, narrative—a philosophy of history of Greeks, Romans, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Romantics, and Pragmatists. It drew widely on the seedbed cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean but owed much to the legacy of Charlemagne and his creation of a territorial European empire.[2] From its Foundation, America was skeptical of Europe and its narratives. Europe was synonymous with persecution, despotism and terror. The notion of Western Civilization, though, convinced enough Americans that Europe was worth saving. It justified American entry, at enormous cost, into the First and Second World Wars.[3]

The idea of Western Civilization found its eventual epitome in the Chicago-based publishing program organized by Robert Hutchins—Encyclopaedia Britannica's Great Books series (1952-)—and in Western Civilization teaching programs in American higher education (Hutchins, 1936).[4] Its influence was greatest during the First World War and the early years of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. However, when America got into trouble fighting an aimless war in Vietnam, the taste for Western Civilization soured. In the late 1960s the American intelligentsia turned decisively against the notion.[5] The West became identified with decline, war, slavery, empire, exploitative globalization, suicidal pathology, ecological mayhem, spiritual crisis, techno-scientific domination, and

much else that was untoward. More curiously, the West was now identified with America. In a head-spinning turn, American intellectuals embraced European philosophies and engaged in a cultural war against 'Western' (read: American) thinking, while Europe, the historic locus of the West, was excused its culpable history of tyranny.

Despite the Eurocentric despair of the American intelligentsia, the West remained throughout all of this a buoyant geo-political symbol and reality. It represented the return of Europe from the civilizational catastrophe of totalitarianism. For a time the idea of a Western civilization and the policymaker's vision of the geopolitical anti-totalitarian West of the post-1945 era coincided. By the 1970s anti-Americanism resurfaced in countries like Germany and began to drive the twin geo-political and civilizational conceptions of the West apart. But their temporary coincidence had already made a huge difference. After the Anglo-American defeat of Nazi Germany, they provided the conceptual umbrella under which Charlemagne's Empire was rebuilt as the European Union—eliminating the fratricidal relations between France and Germany, and overcoming the temptations of totalitarianism. When, after prolonged entropy, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989-1991, it became possible to incorporate a range of states on the Eastern margins of Europe into this project, exceeding even Charlemagne's reach.

America after 1945 was the *guarantor* of a re-born European civilization. Extraordinary numbers of Americans lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars to rescue Europe from fratricidal and totalitarian misery—400,000 in WWII alone.[6] In the post-war era, the primary burden for the defense of Europe was carried by the United States. The conjugation of American and Europe under the rubric of the West was a logical reflection of close trading, investment, and military ties after 1945. Yet, for all of this, America and Europe were an odd pairing. America may have been *for* Europe but it was not *of* Europe. Nothing in Charlemagne's imagination would have prepared him for the New World, and much about the Old European World worried Americans, not least the black holes into which so much of Europe had fallen in the course of the twentieth century. America may have rescued Western civilization from totalitarian barbarism, but a persistent question remained whether America *belonged to* the West or whether it was simply the *guarantor of* the West? No matter how often policy makers might invoke the geo-political imperatives of the West, and no matter how real these were, many, if not

most, Americans (including many, if not most, policy makers) saw the United States as an exceptional society. It was an exception to the corruptions of the world at large and in particular to the corruptions of Old Europe ('Core Europe'), an indispensable part of any definition of the West.

Throughout American history, Europe has always represented *vice* counter-posed to American *virtue*: the Old World to the New World, Old England to New England, Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land, despotism to liberty, indentured serfdom to yeoman farming, primogeniture to free-holding, manufacturing misery to agrarian Eden, big cities to small towns, decadence to purity, paternalism to self-help, cynicism to innocence, status to achievement, inertial crowds to expanding frontier, patrician capitalism to progressive industrialism, global markets to domestic markets, national protection to free trade, free trade to tariff barriers, empire to democracy, overseas empire to continental empire, landed empire to maritime empire, Catholicism to Protestantism, wage slavery to property owning, dogmatic truth to libertarian opinion, commercial speculation to producer rationality, laissez-faire to scientific management, trusts to laissez-faire, state socialism to welfare liberalism, bureaucratic collectivism to individual freedom, dictatorship to law, family capitalism to intellectual capitalism, the French Revolution to the American Revolution, terror to elections, early retirement to hard work—in short, entropy to high-energy order.

Sometimes American impatience with Europe expressed itself through isolationism and inward-looking nationalism. The notion that the U.S. is a spearhead of the West runs against the grain of much conservative and liberal sentiment in America.[7] American ideologists of widely varying stripes think that American virtue flourishes best in isolation, and that the West is tainted either with an unacceptable history of aggression and domination or else with an equally unacceptable history of secularization and nihilism.[8] At the same time, exceptionalism sometimes is expressed through outward-looking interventionism. Late twentieth-century neo-conservatives saw America as a force for the global spread of democracy. They rejected both liberal criticism of America as an unconscionable aggressor-dominator and the national-conservative preference for a less perforated society. Neo-conservative America was internationalist. Yet it still stood

apart from most other nations. Notably it took issue with Europe's reluctance to confront modern vertiginous despotism.

For all of the unquestionable uniqueness of American society ('only in America'), its exceptionalism paradoxically is not an exception. Indeed this exceptionalism increasingly has channelled itself through America's strong elective affinities and alliances with other settler societies and its 'special relationship' with the United Kingdom. It is notable that the UK produced most of the modern settler societies—not least the United States itself. In interesting ways, America's ambivalence towards Europe echoes the United Kingdom's own ambivalence to the 'European idea' of Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Jean Monnet—architects of post-1945 European integration. Winston Churchill's careful depiction of Britain as both *inside and outside* of Europe epitomises this. In his famous speech in Zurich in 1946 Churchill urged the construction of a 'United States of Europe'. Yet he did not see the United Kingdom as part of that project but rather its 'friend and sponsor'.[9] British exceptionalism in relation to Europe is not all that different from the exceptionalism of the United States. It ultimately rests on the peculiar social physics of Britain as a society that is the product of waves of invasion, conquest, and migration—from the Romans through the Danes, Saxons, Normans, Huguenots, Dutch, Jews, Caribbean Islanders, Africans, Pakistanis, Indians, not to mention the complex patterns of internal conquest and migration and circulation between the English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish.[10]

American exceptionalism is the greatest expression of the exceptionalism of the settler society cohort. This cluster of societies has a discrete character, and one that cuts across the East/West distinction. Indeed, among the most successful modern settler societies are Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. While ultra-Modern and often even quasi-Anglophone, the East Asian settler states are also indelibly Chinese. The exceptionalism of the settler societies makes sense of some things that otherwise are hard to explain—for example the very close ties of the United States to settler states like Israel, Taiwan, and Australia in spite of their relatively small size.[11] Thus, while American policy makers spend vast sums on the defence of Europe, they spend vastly more per capita on defending the Israeli settler state.[12]

The West is a fraught concept. Historically it derives from the geo-political division of the late Roman Empire into eastern and western zones. The West was also a symbol of civilized order during the anarchy and entropy of Europe's Dark Age. Order meant in effect 'a new Rome'. Unsurprisingly the architect of the first Europe, Charlemagne, went to Rome in order to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope in 800. Yet, while the constellations of Rome and Europe shared certain characteristics, Europe was no renaissance of Rome. Both had world ambitions. Both looked beyond the conventional social scale and geographic reach of commands and rules. Both had a strong impetus toward social self-organization. But the European model of autopoiesis was that of the Creator God. The Classical model in contrast invoked Nature's God. The classical image of Nature's God extended back as far as the pre-Socratic Greek idea of *phusis*. Classical Nature was a lively universe of forms built out of symmetries, proportions, scales and rhythms, and animated by a world spirit or *pneuma*. The European model, in contrast, drew heavily on the idea of genesis. Divine 'origin' rather than sacred 'order' was the most important characteristic of European or Western Nature.

The implications of this have cast a long shadow. Self-organizing societies are mediated in one of two ways—either by orderly morphological patterns or by the explosive upsurge of genesis out of nothing and the return to incommensurable (dynastic, biblical, racial, national) sources. Three clusters of self-organizing societies have appeared in history to date—the ancient Greco-Roman, the Eurocentric Western, and the Anglo-American-Settler kinds.[13] Each has relied on either pattern or genesis thinking. For all of its pyrotechnic modernity, America turned out to be much closer in spirit to the autopoietics of Greco-Roman antiquity than Europe. America today harbors many weird ideologies—from Old Testament moralism to Hollywood liberalism. Bewildering varieties of apocalyptic and technocratic, libertarian and communitarian world views share the same public space. They can do so because their influence is small compared with the automata-like workings of constitutional balance and public order instituted by the America's Deist Founders. What the Founders were after was a mimesis of Nature's God. Both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison pointedly invoked this phrase, as did Tom Paine. The European story was quite different. Whereas creationism became a durable but risible oddity in America, romanticism ended up as Europe's all-consuming

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ideology and the crucible of race empires, totalitarianism, fascism, and terrorism (Murphy & Roberts, 2004). While Europe borrowed ideas of nature and form from the Classical world, from the ninth century onwards the Eurocentric West developed its own Faustian (Romanesque-Gothic-Baroque-Romantic) culture. In this culture, form gave way to infinity, and the yearning for infinity was fueled by a desire for negation. The Faustian world pioneered the equation of 'being' with 'nothingness'. Its eros lusted after the null, the void, the zero—the oblivion (*lethe*) and the *nihil* (Nothing) that lay beyond the boundary of existence.[14]

If plastic figures and well-bounded bodies defined Classical culture, a taste for the immeasurable and illimitable characterized the Faustian culture of Europe. While there are major overlaps between the Settler Society Cohort and the Eurocentric West, there is also an important difference between them. The former have been peculiarly resistant to the Faustian component of the Western makeup. Faustian impulses have influenced the settler societies. Their military, businessmen and intellectuals have been routinely touched by Faustian urges. They all have experienced bloody episodes of excess but nothing at all to compare with the awful thanatocratic history that extends from the holy war of the Crusades to the pan-national totalitarianism of Hitler. Settler societies, when tempted by extremism, have usually pulled back from the brink. They have managed for the most part to deflate the lure of Faustian storms with a love of grace, balance and equilibrium.[15] They have been deft in deflating 'storm and stress'—by turning Romantic nihilism into charming landscapes or Baroque grandiosity into mild rituals of state. In this way, they have avoided the propensity of Faustian culture to turn self-regulating order into self-annihilating disorder—and high energy into obsessive death seeking.[16]

FREEDOM AND ORDER

If America and Europe are so different, why did the narrative of Western Civilization become popular in the American imagination at the time of the First World War and after the Second World War? One reason is that it addressed important questions about the nature of order and anarchy. American political thought traditionally has focused on questions of contingency: freedom, change, choice, hope, and opportunity. It is difficult to over-estimate just how strongly these resonate in the American imagination.

But there are also fundamental aspects of the human condition that these themes do not address. Self-regulating order is one of these. The idea of autopoietic civilization explains how order is possible in societies that exhibit high levels of social or personal contingency.

In certain respects it does not matter whether we are talking about the Greco-Roman world, the Eurocentric West, or America and the Settler Cohort, the basic condition of order in a free society is the same. Freedom requires form. Without it, autopoietic (autonomous) societies collapse into chaos or nihilism. Contingency without order, choice without nature, opportunity without social physics, and freedom without design—all of these turn human energy into a shapeless waste. Yet order is also often confused with dictatorship, hierarchy or law-fixation. Such false order strangles human energies. It is as debilitating as nihilism but in the other direction. Overall, too little structure dissipates energy while too much structure squeezes the life out of energy. Either way the result is depression and entropy. Avoidance of entropy requires open social systems. These allow the import and export of social energies across system boundaries. But the freedom of traffic between systems becomes destructive unless these boundaries can also be maintained, ensuring systems have an identity. The 'form dimension' of social organization operates at a pre-linguistic level. In contrast the 'freedom dimension' of social systems is overtly, and often loudly, linguistic in nature. It is articulated through explicit ideologies and claims to rights.

Americans have been very fertile in devising political ideologies: progressivism, populism, welfare-state liberalism, neo-conservatism, and post-modern liberalism among them. Most of these ideologies had their origins in American borrowings from European natural rights ideas. The dominant Lockean strand in American political thinking equates nature with rights. This applies even to ideologies that refuse the title liberal. In America, 'liberal' has narrow as well as broad connotations. Voters sub-divide into the Big Three cohorts of liberals, moderates and conservatives—about a third each of the voting populace. Yet almost everyone uses the 'language of rights'. Thus, American romanticism presents as antinomian liberalism or as libertarian conservatism while neo-conservatives prefer Anglo-Scottish to French-Continental Enlightenment (Kristol, 1983; Novak, 1982). In the end most American ideologies are variations of the 'grand

American liberal tradition' as Allan Bloom called it (1987: 334). Only genuine reactionaries (racists, xenophobes, misogynists) exempt themselves from this.

The equation of nature with rights, however, presents a problem. It powerfully unites, but also confusingly conflates, pre-linguistic nature with the declaration of rights. This means that natural rights ideologies have only a limited efficacy. This becomes clearer when we begin to consider society from the standpoint not of 'rights and liberties' but of meaningful 'order'.[17] To be clear—let us assume natural rights as a given. Let us not enter into a quarrel with natural rights, as reactionaries do, but then let us also go one step further and ask: how does a society, with widely-dispersed 'rights and liberties', create order for itself? In other words, how does this society solve what Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) called 'the problem of order'?[18] How does it create a sacred canopy for itself—an ordering of things that gives coherence, pattern and meaning to human deeds (Berger, 1967)?

Historically, American political ideologies had much to say about freedom but shied away from a protracted discussion of how social order is possible. And yet a deep impatience with the recurrent disorders of Europe underlay American thinking in general. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, this gap could be papered over by saying that the disorders of Europe were the consequence of despotism and that freedom was the antidote to disorder. By that time, though, there had begun to appear a phenomenon that the category of despotism in the classic sense did not fully explain. By 1918 in Europe, the Balkans, and European-controlled Africa, a series of holocausts had taken place. These went far beyond the bounds of normal political violence. In these holocausts, death had emerged as the end of politics, rather than just one of its means. Death's rationale was no longer fear or submission, victory or conquest. Death's justification instead had become death itself.

The idea of civilization was a retort to this. 'Western civilization' promised to unite Americans and Europeans against 'thantatism'. Yet European culture was a primary source of this lethal trend. Representatives of Europe's civilization openly offered the gift of death to humankind. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger in 1926 infamously described Man as a being unto death (1980). No ancient philosopher could have made such a statement. But, as Nietzsche had observed, the Europeans had finally killed off the

Platonic God of Nature. After centuries of ambivalence toward Classical culture, Europeans simply disowned the super-sensory realm of Ideas, Forms, Nature, and Beauty. What was really troubling about this was that the 'death of God' turned more or less instantly into the 'God of death' (Murphy & Roberts, 2004). This 'new' God had long been latent in Europe's litany of negative theologies. But, in the totalitarian twentieth century, it now became an explicit force. The political theology of the Faustian God of negation, finally unchained from the constraint of Classical Nature, led Europeans into the pit of self-immolation. The God of Nihil was 'the Nothing that horrifies man and displaces him from his usual dallying and evasions'. This was a God that called humankind 'to recoil in terror of annihilation and to be horrified by devastation'. This was the Being that was Nothing—the Surplus that was Empty.[19]

From its European crucible, the doctrine of Nihil spread to Islamist and Japanese fascists in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. But Americans, for the most part, were immune to it. Why this is so is an interesting question. Eager to explain away the catastrophe of Nazism, Heidegger pointed his finger at the God of metaphysics.[20] Platonism was the cause of Europe's disgrace. But holding a dead God responsible for European nihilism was intellectual dishonesty at its worst. If anything, the opposite was true. The God of Form, Nature and Beauty has habitually inspired resistance in societies corrupted by nihilistic disorder.[21] America was able to resist the totalitarian plague because it was *a metaphysical republic*. In the settler societies of the New World, Classical Nature was never repudiated. Intellectuals toyed with the idea of doing so, but outside the universities this was never accepted, and even inside the universities voices like Heidegger's student Leo Strauss (who had fled Nazi Germany) could repeatedly assert that there is a Nature that is imperishable, that cannot be voided, nullified or negated, and that cannot be put into question.[22] In America, the God of Nihil remained on trial. It had to answer to Nature's God.

Here we see the great opposition in modernity: between a nihilism that is self-devouring and a classical nature that has no beginning and no end. On one side of the divide is the necroromanticism of the Faustian Creator God. On the other side is the God glimpsed in the unlethal truth (*alētheia*) of the ancient Greeks—in Nature's implicit resistance to the necropolitics of death. Even Locke and Hobbes, who reduced Nature to

Natural Rights, agreed on this. Accordingly, a government that fails to protect its citizens or subjects from death, or that encourages movements of 'thanatics', violates the *phusis* on which the state is erected. To define the human being as a being unto death, or society's work as producing the terror of annihilation, is to adopt the standpoint of the necropolis. Americans in the main found this repulsive. Instinctively, they asserted 'life against death'.[23] The best of their intellectuals warned of the appeal of the city of tombs. Lewis Mumford did so repeatedly.[24] What Americans sensed was the radical deterioration of the capacity of some societies to assert order in the face of chaos. The very point of such an order was that it did not spiral down through a lack of energy or spirit into depression, de-moralisation, and death-fixation. In American terms, this might best be described as an order of liberty. This is a kind of freedom, like the freedom of a great dancer or a great athlete, which is expressed through grace, balance, and limit.

NO GOING HOME

Americans are familiar with the difficulty of creating an order of liberty. Such an order is a paradoxical hyphenation of two seemingly contrary things: contingency and necessity. Liberty is the political expression of contingency. The American world is filled with contingency. This world—modern through and through—is the product of rights. Rights or permissions don't direct action but rather leave action to the choice of the individual. This is a social world where contingency and uncertainty are pervasive, and choice and election are inescapable suppositions for action and conduct.[25] American political ideologies venerate the '*I can*' and the '*we can*'. But, in order that they 'make sense', contingent acts—free acts—have to be integrated into a larger whole. Otherwise such acts end up being arbitrary or absurd. St. Augustine described this as the universe constantly sliding towards the abyss of nothingness. Cumulatively, acts that are arbitrary or absurd portend chaos. Chaos is the antonym of order, and it is order that signifies meaning. Human beings create meaning by organizing contingent elements and actions into patterns and systems.

For Americans, large-scale order is most visibly represented in the idea of a 'new order of the ages'—the constitutional schema that the American Founders created. But underlying this is a still larger order of meaning. Religion is often used as a descriptor of

this. Most Americans will tell you they believe in God. America is more conventionally religious and more church going than any other modern nation and most pre-modern ones. But this sociological fact is less important than the metaphysical sense that permeates American society. This metaphysics is roughly equivalent to what the ancient Greeks called *phusis*. Emerson offered the most characteristic American reading of *phusis*. He called it the choral harmony of the whole. Notably the most perceptive European observer of the Americans, Tocqueville, missed the centrality of *phusis* thinking to America. The United States is everything that Tocqueville said it was. It is restless, rootless, vulgar, enterprising, improving, levelling, and teeming. But it also has an enormous capacity to turn turbulent energy into visible order without hierarchies or rules. Emerson identified the medium for extracting temperate order out of restless chaos: 'Design. It is all design. It is all beauty. It is all astonishment.'[26]

However such *phusis* is interpreted—whether it is understood as Nature, God, Beauty or Necessity—it is the intimation of something sacred. It is sacred not because it signifies a particular order of existence, but *because it signifies the very existence of order*. Alexander Pope put it beautifully: 'Order is heaven's first law'. Tom Paine spoke movingly of the 'unerring order and universal harmony reigning throughout the whole' of nature—through self, society, and cosmos. What is sacred about this order is the equilibrium at the heart of it. Such equilibrium has a social pay-off. It is the force that orchestrates the flow of energy between social actors, social parts, and social systems. This flow stops or at least delays the onset of entropy. Balance thus secures negative entropy. When such order is torn asunder, we know that something terrible is at work. The opposite of order is chaos.

When societies, states, and empires slide into chaos, the question of civilization is posed. When this began to happen near the turn of the twentieth century—notably in the Balkans in the 1890s, and then in the First World War—Americans asked themselves: can we (should we) do anything to avert it? There were two possible answers to this question. One said that the descent into the abyss was the product of the vices of the Old World, and Americans should leave well alone. The other said that America had a responsibility to mend and restore or replace the sacred canopy when it had been torn asunder. One response was isolationist; the other was internationalist. But either response

required justification to the world. By the beginning of the twentieth century America had become large enough and powerful enough that it had to answer for its actions—or its inactions. The problem was: in what 'language' could it respond? Its home-grown ideologies were not much help to it. They were 'domestic languages'—intelligible for local consumption. Foreigners found them opaque.

The thing that is striking about America's home-grown ideologies—the republic's broad-spectrum of liberalisms—is that they have had little resonance outside of the United States. Where variants of European socialism spread around the world, virtually no American natural rights ideology found followers abroad. The American way of talking about the experience of contingency translated badly. The idea of a Herbert Croly-style German or Egyptian 'progressive' is virtually inconceivable.[27] While European natural rights philosophies proved to be highly exportable, not least of all to the United States, their incarnation in the various strands of American political ideology defied re-export. This posed a number of problems for a new world power: not just for the communication of its influence to others, but also for explaining itself, orientating itself in the world, and understanding the nature of others with whom it had to deal.

In 1955, the Harvard historian Louis Hartz (1919-1986) observed that liberalism had acquired a virtual stranglehold on the American mind. America's 'irrational Lockeanism' had become 'one of the most powerful absolutisms in the world' (1955: 58, also 3-23, 58-60). Hartz noted that, as a result, America lacked a crucial combative horizon—something against which natural rights nostrums must struggle if America was to gain an adequate understanding of itself and of others in the world. Hartz's argument was that natural rights thinking had emerged in Europe in the modern age as an adversarial force in opposition to the thought of the *ancien regime*. In turn, natural rights doctrines had been strenuously challenged by feudal ('tory'), socialist, and radical ideas. Hartz had the notion that a world-encompassing dialectic that might eventually provoke America into an intellectual engagement on a macro-historical scale. What caught Hartz's attention were idea fragments that had lodged in various places in the New World—the rural Calvinism of the Dutch (Boers) in South Africa, the reformist ex-English socialists in Australia, and Catholic Aristotelianism in French Quebec and Latin America. He never fully articulated it but he seemed to hope for a conversation, or perhaps an argument, of

American natural rights liberalism with the feudalisms, socialisms, and radicalisms of the New World (1964).

At any rate, Hartz made a telling point: to answer the dilemmas of modern political life, America had to *step outside of its own self*. 'Instead of recapturing our past, we have got to transcend it… There is no going home again for America' (1955: 32). But if America could not 'go home', then where and how could it find the intellectual *agon* that it seemed to lack? Hartz's reference to Catholic Aristotelianism appeared to give the most credible hint. This was not because it promised a re-run of the Catholic-Protestant divide that once had fired Europe. That *agon* was of another time and place. It had been convincingly extinguished in America by the natural rights doctrine that separated church and state, and guaranteed freedom of worship. Rather it was the case that Aristotelianism and Catholicism were as equally adept as Enlightenment natural rights ideas *in translating across time and space*. Like the Enlightenment, they had 'no home'. In order for America *not* to go home, its natural rights tradition had to be paired with some powerful contrarian currents.

The Chicago Encyclopaedists had similar intuitions. Certainly Robert Hutchins did. Hutchins' legacy was two-fold. In the 1930s, during his tenure as President of the University of Chicago, Hutchins promoted the works of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Cardinal Newman as paradigm instances of the Great Books,[28] and he encouraged around himself Neo-Aristotelians like Richard McKeon (1998-, 1990).[29] Later, in 1941, Hutchins co-founded the Committee on Social Thought also at the University of Chicago.[30] This founding was Hutchins's greatest legacy. No intellectual centre in America ever attracted so many brilliant minds. Its early members included Leo Strauss (1949-1967), Saul Bellow (1962-1993), Hannah Arendt (1963-1967), and Friedrich Hayek (1950-1962).[31] For all of this, though, it was the Neo-Aristotelian experiment that was closer to Hutchins' own desire to create the bridge between Europe and America represented by the Great Books tradition—the epitome of Western Civilization.

Chicago Neo-Aristotelianism developed in parallel with Catholic Neo-Thomism.[32] Both understood that form was the necessary correlate of freedom, and that contingency required an encompassing order. Yet their understanding of this was curiously abstract. Both confused history with the history of reading texts. The orthodox

Neo-Thomist account of Being is inseparable from 'acts of interpretation' of the Great Books of the Classical-Christian corpus.[33] This is ironic given the traditional Catholic bias towards visual and audile culture. Neo-Thomism ended up mimicking the Hebraic-Protestant passion for texts.[34]

LIQUID GEOGRAPHY AND SACRED CANOPY

Neo-Thomism and Neo-Aristotelianism were too bookish, and the counter-Lockean currents of the New World were too distant or too antediluvian, to be more than curiosities to Americans.[35] One interesting thing of lasting value that Hartz's thesis about the New World did introduce, though, was the figure of geography. Hartz concluded that location was a determinant of political ideology. It mattered whether political ideologies came from Quebec or from New England, from the American Mid-West or from the American West. More important still than the specifics of Hartz's work was his general approach. The reader of his classic work *The Founding of New Societies* is invited to look at history and politics through the lenses of space and geography. This is valuable because it helps us begin to answer the question of civilization ('what is it?') in ways that the Great Books approach cannot do and does not do.

Space in the guise of geography is, and always has been, a major determinant of civilization. It conditions what civilization is and where it emerges. The question of civilization at its heart is a question about order and chaos. Certain geographies—that is also to say certain arrangements of nature—tacitly cooperate in the creation of order. They become Nature's—or the Cosmos's—correlate of social order: an aid to the creation of social meaning and an impediment to its dissipation through entropy. Sea regions, littoral topographies, and the liquid geographies of rivers and coasts are particularly important in the creation of civilization. Liquid geographies are nature's 'breath' (*pneuma*). In the course of human history, these have been amongst the most important spaces of passage. They have been the spaces that have regulated the most intense comings and goings, giving and receiving, entries and exits of human beings.[36]

This pneumatic circularity lies at the core of Being. The rhythm of being is inscribed in the nature of civilization. Social systems dissipate entropy or disorder, at least for a time, through the interactions (giving and receiving) between system and

environment.[37] 'Breath' or *pneuma* is a model or metaphor for an alternating, dyadic rhythm. This is nature in the sense of the Greek *phusis*. In so many of its aspects, civilization is an artifice. It is the work of human ingenuity and design. But this human ingenuity is always conditioned by nature. Nature aids design. 'Obey nature', advised the Stoics. In practice, autopoietic civilization does follow nature.

One of the indubitable aspects of nature is space. From the standpoint of civilization, the most interesting kinds of spaces are those of passage and traffic, circulation and revolution. Such spaces exist only in the abstract—as pure potential— until human beings make something of them: until, for example, the American pioneers crossed the Appalachian Mountains to settle in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys— blessed with the great river systems that connect the Great Lakes system with the Caribbean Sea. In doing so, these settlers, unconsciously, were enacting a 'sacred' space: one that had its own kind of implicit rhythmic order. This was a space where human beings acted in a mimesis of nature. It was the Sphinx of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson, who understood the macro-temporal and macro-spatial significance of this. After all, he purchased precisely this 'geography of connection' from the French. He saw it as a central to the creation of an 'empire of liberty' that would evade the chaos of European history: the chaos caused by Faustian despotism.

Jefferson's intuition was supported by precedent. For even across the Atlantic, the great examples of civilization were creations and creatures of liquid geographies: the Mediterranean-Black Sea region and the North Sea-Baltic Sea region—and the fingers of the rivers that drained into them. From these littoral regions had arisen classical antiquity, the Renaissance, and the modern civic capitalism of North-West Europe. What had existed on the maritime periphery of Europe was multiplied in the case of North America. For Nature had blessed North America with a historically unprecedented series of sea and littoral regions suited to intensive commercial, civic, and intellectual transactions: the Eastern Seaboard (Boston, Philadelphia, Washington), the Hudson-Great Lakes' region (New York City, Detroit, Toronto, Chicago), the Mississippi-Gulf-Floridian Peninsula region (St. Louis, New Orleans, Houston, Miami), the California Coast region (San Francisco, Los Angeles), and the Puget Sound region (Seattle, Portland, Vancouver).

Those who like irony should relish the fact that world history is regional. It is the creation of littoral city regions with world reach—in exactly the sense that Venetian traders and bankers impacted economies and societies from the Baltic to the Silk Route. That America, by the beginning of the twentieth century, had become world historical is without question. What is more intriguing to observe is the foundation upon which America's ascent to world history was achieved. It is interesting to compare America with Athens and Rome. These states launched themselves from *one* sea region (the Mediterranean) or in the case of the classical Greeks it is perhaps more accurate to say *two* sea regions: the Mediterranean and Black Seas—fighting over the command of the passage between those two seas provided the basis for Greek cycle of epic and tragedy rooted in the story of the Trojan war. The rise of American power and civilization was based not on one or even two but on at least *five* sea regions. (*Six* if we add the historic case of Canada's Hudson Bay.) One of the things that make Thomas Jefferson great is that he had inklings of this. He intuited that America eventually would cross east and west and north and south from coast to coast.[38]

Like many of his generation, Jefferson was schooled in classical history and philosophy (Murphy, 2001: 284-289). It is difficult for casual observers to appreciate the modernity of this. What gave Jefferson such an interesting view of macro-history is precisely that this was history not understood from the standpoint of territorial Europe but from the standpoint of the littoral. American models of government and civilization came from the maritime periphery: from the ancient and Renaissance Mediterranean, and from the North Sea powers, the British and Dutch, and their notions of Commonwealth and Republic.[39] Antiquity was especially productive for thinking about social models independent of the real-politick of the day.

We find the sympathy that Jefferson and his Deist peers had for Classical archetypes resurrected in the twentieth century, especially amongst the brilliant cohort of thinkers concentrated around the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. This cohort did what Jefferson had done: they forged an astonishing and paradoxical world view of modernizing classicism. As in the case of Jefferson, this allowed them to take on board and yet at the same time qualify the instinctive natural rights ethos of America—to make of nature something more than inalienable rights. To

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do this required a philosophical history—or rather a philosophical geography—of America that was not dependent on the history and geography of Europe in Charlemagne's sense.

To play the classicist as Jefferson did might be thought a curiosity, yet it implied a skeptical nod toward a history and geography (the history and geography of Old Europe) that many, perhaps most, Americans saw themselves as being an exception to. Even Americans who were vociferously pro-Western in international policy had doubts about the catastrophes of the European past. The West seemed to them to be more like a burden to be carried than a model to be admired. The views of the latter-day Chicagoans, contemporaries of Louis Hartz, agreed with Hartz at least in this—that there could be 'no going home again for America'. As we have seen, Hartz fished around the New World for agonistic partners for American liberalism, a strategy not without merit. Hartz intuitively identified civilization with settler societies. This was a brilliant intuition, but one that he never fully developed.

The latter-day Chicagoans looked elsewhere—to the historic, multi-layered civilizational seedbed of the Eastern Mediterranean.[40] There is an argument to be made that, already in antiquity, the Eastern Mediterranean was one of the principal historic progenitors of settler societies (Murphy, 2001:19-20). It laid down a template for all later settler states. In that sense, there was a tacit convergence of the latter-day Chicagoans and the Hartz thesis. But this convergence is only to be seen in hindsight. The Chicagoans explicit preoccupation was the Eastern Mediterranean—its philosophical, political, and religious history. This was a mirror against which North Americans could measure themselves and their role in the world. What the 1950s and 60s generation of Chicagoans proposed, in effect, was a dialogue between the shores of the Great Lakes and the ecumene of the Eastern Mediterranean. William McNeil (1964, 1974 & 1978) furnished a series of world historical studies of the terrain between the Crimea and Venice—spanning the Venetian and Ottoman Empires and Modern Greece. Leo Strauss defended classical nature, and questioned modern natural right. With a Socratic gesture, he ironized the American idea of the liberal—turning him into a Greek gentleman. Hannah Arendt sketched America's debt to Greece and Rome (1963), and offered a non-Lockean account of the human condition (1958). In *On Revolution*, she presented the first great

philosophical account of the difference between Europe and America. Friedrich Hayek famously defended Anglo-American self-organization against European centralism. English Old Whig ideas stood in for the Greeks in Hayek's social philosophy.

OPEN SYSTEMS

Chicago was a prism for a powerful idea. This was the notion that American self-understanding was best served by looking in the civilizational mirror of the Eastern Mediterranean. Hannah Arendt exemplifies the prismatic quality of Chicago. She was the paradigmatic New York intellectual but her consummate work, *The Human Condition*, came out of the Walgreen Lectures she gave at the University of Chicago in 1956. The case of Eric Voegelin echoes this. Working away in that faded residue of former littoral power—Baton Rouge in Louisiana—he developed reflections 'on the form of the American mind'[41] into a long meditation on the species of order represented by the Mediterranean ecumene (1956-1987, 1989). The first mature statement of Voegelin's philosophy, *The New Science of Politics*, was created during a short tenure at the University of Chicago, where he delivered the 1951 Walgreen Lectures.[42] Similarly, in Toronto in the early 1950s, Harold Innis' mercurial studies of modern communications and empire drew heavily on comparisons with the Greco-Roman past.[43] The prism of Chicago again was notable. Innis had completed his PhD at the University of Chicago.

Chicago was not omnipresent. Lewis Mumford regarded the Greek *polis* as the measure of civilization but owed this view to a New York education and to the early influence of Emerson, not to mid-Western Hellenism.[44] Yet Saul Bellow was still right to note the peculiar power of Chicago over the life of the mind. The case of the Austrian expatriate Ludwig von Bertalanffy illustrates this perfectly. In 1937-1938, Bertalanffy gave his first lectures on General System Theory—at the University of Chicago.[45] He was a little different, though, from most of the post-war Chicagoans. Bertalanffy was deeply influenced by the macro-historical thought of the 1920s and 1930s: Toynbee and Spengler. He wrote little on the triangulation of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem. Yet his work—or rather his central thesis—is crucial to understanding why the Eastern Mediterranean rather than the West made good sense as a mirror for American self-understanding of the nature of civilization.

Bertalanffy introduced the notion of the open system (1968). He coined the term for biology, and then applied it across the spectrum of natural and human sciences. Biological organisms, he noted, were systems of elements. Bertalanffy distinguished two kinds of systems. The first kind, the (traditionally conceived) physical system, does not exchange matter with its environment. The system is closed. Without the import and export of matter, the system gradually runs down or breaks down. Closed systems invariably suffer entropy. The fate of a closed system is disintegration and death. Organisms in contrast can evade entropy—at least up to a point—by importing and exporting matter. This is the definition of an open system: matter flows across the boundaries of the system.

Bertalanffy applied his distinction between open and closed systems to many kinds of systems—including social systems. Indeed, in the case of social systems, the application is very apt. Most societies and states suffer from entropy at some time or other. Some suffer this more than others. In Bertalanffy's own lifetime (1901-1972), this was spectacularly true of the Eurasian empires: the Austro-Hungarian, German, Russian, Ottoman, and Soviet Empires. Each ended in breakdown, disintegration, and dissolution. Sometimes the run-down of a social system expresses itself in crisis and the incapacity for reform. Other times entropy-death, manifest in the commission of unnatural crimes, becomes its very rationale for existence. The bleakness of traditional social suffering is exceeded by a new, infernal kind of suffering that beggars the imagination. We see the latter exemplified by the fratricide of Europe in the First World War, the Nazi death camps, the Soviet Gulag (20 million dead), Idi Amin's Ugandan dictatorship (1971-1979, 300,000 dead), Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia (1975-1979, 1.7 million murdered), Radovan Karadzic's and Slobodan Miloševic's genocide in ex-Yugoslavia (1991-1995, 430,000 killed, 3 million displaced), the fratricidal Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988, 1 million killed) and the 35 years of Iraq's Baathist necropolis (another quarter-to-a-half million dead and 4 million exiled), or Africa's civil wars at the millennium's end: the Democratic Republic of Congo four decades on from 1960 and 2 million dead,[46] a grisly book-ending of King Léopold II of Belgium's late nineteenth-century heart of darkness where at least 5 million Congolese were killed.[47]

One of the reasons that America looked upon itself as an exceptional society was its sense of repulsion at the history of social entropy in Europe and elsewhere. In 1904, the African-American leader Booker T. Washington observed of King Léopold's deeds: 'There was never anything in American slavery that could be compared to the barbarous conditions existing today in the Congo Free State.' Robert Park—later to become the great Chicago School sociologist—campaigned with Washington against the Congolese killing field. In their public agitation through the Congo Reform Association, the pair paid homage to the opening paragraph of the American Declaration of Independence and its assertion of the inalienable right to life. Against the background of repeated crises of civilization in Europe and European-controlled societies, this was an affirmation of the universal law against murder and the slaughter of innocents. It was also an affirmation of the American metaphysics of order.

Civilization is a synonym for puzzling about social entropy. American interest in this question picked up around the First World War. This was partly because of the great European fratricide—and the question of whether America should intervene to stop it. Partly, also, American interest was raised because of the emergence in the late nineteenth century of movements that had begun to employ terror not only as the means but also increasingly as the *end* of political action: these movements appear in different guises, again and again, from turn-of-the-century Russian Slavophiles and Balkan irredentist nationalist terrorists through the Stalinist wing of the Bolshevik Party to the Italian Red Brigades and the German Baider-Meinhoff Gang in the 1970s to Islamist terrorists in the 1990s and 2000s with their mix of fascist ideology, anti-Semitism, and lurid pan-nationalist fantasies.

Thanatocracy—rule by death—poses dilemmas. There is the temptation of normal states to back thanatocracies because of the imperatives of real politick. Take one example: Anastasio Somoza Debayle's 'anti-communist' regime in Nicaragua (1959-1980)—it killed possibly 50,000 of its own citizens. It took the United States government till 1978 to suspend its military aid to the regime. In the 1960s and 1970s, the low point of U.S. diplomacy, the American state regularly backed murderous dictators—from Suharto in Indonesia through Pinochet in Chile to Marcos in the Philippines. The long-term damage caused to these societies by tyranny was enormous. Realists, like U.S.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, invoked European theories of international relations that relied on despots to contain a greater despotism (Communism). Romantic critics of this sordid realism replied with the adoration of Communist despotism. The lesson of the twentieth century was that such politics only encourages thanatocracy to do its worst.

Thanatocratic classes, though, will wage vicious wars to stay in power. So withholding support from or overthrowing a thanatocracy requires acute political and military judgment. Such political and military judgment rests on a more fundamental judgment: at what point can we determine that a state has fallen into the bestiarium?[48] Even more difficult is to understand how such regimes can be prevented from emerging in the first place. How can we prevent a society sliding into the black hole of entropy and death?

Bertalanffy gave an interesting answer to this question. He had grown up with Spengler and Toynbee as early influences. He never lost his affection for their works (1975: 74-84). Both thinkers were products of the twentieth-century crisis of European civilization. Spengler foresaw the end of the Faustian West. The first six volumes of Toynbee's nine-volume *A Study of History* were published between 1934 and 1939—as Europe plunged into barbarism. Bertalanffy's answer to the question of how social entropy could be avoided was more theoretical rather historical but it was no less cogent for that: societies avoid entropy by creating themselves as open systems. Societies that import and export matter across boundaries can resist entropy. The flipside of resisting entropy is the capacity for systemic organization at ever-higher levels. Open systems typically move in the direction of greater complexity: the greater the negative entropy of a social system, the greater the number of parts of the social system that can be integrated with each other. Negative entropy, as Bertalanffy observes, can be considered as a measure of order and organization (1975: 111). Order is the opposite of chaos. Social systems in decline are subject to chaos. Breakdown, disintegration, and dissolution take effect through chaos.

According to Bertalanffy, order is generated when import-export occurs between a social system and its environment. This helps us understand why the latter-day Chicagoans were right to single out the Eastern Mediterranean as a key to American self-understanding of civilization. It was not because Athens and Rome and Jerusalem were

the home of many Great Books—even if they were. It was rather that this liquid region, at its greatest, functioned with very high levels of transaction between social system and environment. To put this in more concrete terms: the Eastern Mediterranean, for much of its history, was a portal space or ecumene. It was dominated by intensive exchanges between its great portal cities and littoral city-regions: Piraeus, Ostia, Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Constantinople, Alexandria, Rhodes, Antioch, and many others.

Social systems that are open continually traffic with their environment: what could be a better description of a portal? A portal or an ecumene is the space where import-export occurs. This space, or this space-time, necessarily corresponds to an open system. An open system has weak borders but strong order. How can we understand this apparent paradox? There are two ways that a social system creates borders: through rules and hierarchies, and through self-organizing order. Rules and hierarchies function to create order but they do not institute self-organizing forms of order. Rules and hierarchies require permissions and authorities to function, and the systems that they organize suffer entropy eventually. Self-organizing order in contrast is abstract and intuitive. It relies not on permissions and authorities but on mathematical-geometric principles such as balance, homology, oscillation, proportion, and symmetry. Bertalanffy thought that one of Spengler's great insights was that social orders have a mathematical foundation (1975: 82). 'Geometric' principles are crucial to the processes that self-organize the interrelation of the parts of a system or the relations between system and environment. The genius of such principles, which we see exemplified in the structure of the American Constitution, is that they function quasi-independently of social actors having to make explicit decisions or give explicit commands. Rather than organizing a social system exclusively on the basis of directions and rules, statuses and rights, in the case of open systems self-organization—operating via pictorial-aesthetic-mathematical models and schemas—plays a crucial role in securing the inter-relationship of social parts.

Bertalanffy supposed that in a closed system something like rules or hierarchies ('laws of nature', 'evolutionary selection') could create order but that open systems were more dynamic because they were self-organizing. The city-states of the Eastern Mediterranean were the first to develop theories of how self-organization works through proportionality, symmetry, rhythm and similar 'geometric' qualities. From these city

states came a deep understanding of the civilizing forces of grace, balance and equilibrium. Taking his cue from Aristotle, Bertalanffy spoke of holistic systems where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The organizing force of the whole is neither additive nor is it a function of rules or codes. Rather, qualities like parallelism, analogy, allometry,[49] lattice and other kinds of branching and clustering, crystalline and meandering patterns provide the organizing force for macroscopic holistic interactions.[50]

ECUMENE AND THE MIRROR CITY

The nub of the proceeding argument is this: to understand the nature of portals, we need to understand the nature of organization without rules or social hierarchies. We can give various names to such organizing forces, not least of all autopoiesis or self-organization. We can also find many examples of this. When we are dealing with social self-organization, some of the most powerful examples occur in portal societies. Reflexive self-analysis of the nature of such societies began in the Classical Mediterranean.

In simple terms, the Eastern Mediterranean ecumene is a model of the water-bound ecumene in general. Even in the modern era of oceanic power, sea regions still remain crucial entities. We cannot imagine the idea of modern natural rights, or modern civic capitalism, without the contribution of the English-Scottish-Dutch North Sea ecumene. In the same way, the economic modernism of twentieth-century Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Shanghai depended on the transactions of the China Seas. We cannot understand the birth of American intellectual life, unless we take into account that it emerged in the littoral world of the Eastern Seaboard and the North American Great Lakes, with their migrant cities and conjugations of nations and nationalities, and their intense rhythms of import-export. This is symbolized neatly by the pragmatism of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead—products of the Great Lakes hugging University of Michigan and University of Chicago, the antipodes of the littoral worlds of Baltimore and Boston from which the work of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce emerged.[51]

The ecumene is a liquid region. It is a liquid space of intersection between social system and environment. Within that region, a particular type of economic, political, and cultural interaction is possible. This can be best grasped with the concept of the 'mirror

city' (Blank, 1999: 265-277). This idea points to the propensity of major cities in a sea ecumene to become 'mirrors' of each other. The history of interaction between portal cities produces porous relationships in language, culture, commerce, and residency. The Mediterranean in both the ancient and modern eras produced well-known examples of mirror cities—for example, Athens and Alexandria in the Hellenistic era—or ones like Marseilles and Algiers today that may fall below the threshold of common awareness but nevertheless remain influences on long-term geo-social, geo-political, and geo-intellectual dynamics.[52] The long-lasting and deep bond between Constantinople and Venice in the Byzantine and Ottoman eras is a spectacular example of a mirror relationship. To date, interactions across oceanic spaces, even with the relative speed of twentieth-century communications and transportation, remain too diffuse to create oceanic mirror cities. But, in more compact sea (or sea-like) spaces, relationships of mirroring continue to be created—with powerful effects.

Chicago is a classic example. Historically, Chicago had three mirrors: Toronto, which faces Chicago from across the waters of the Great Lakes, Detroit which looks northward across the liquid border to Canada, and New York City.[53] Their history of linkage is complex, not least in the case of New York. New Yorkers were instrumental in financing the development of Chicago in the nineteenth century. Chicago in turn was instrumental in getting the Erie Canal built—allowing a continuous fluid passage between New York City on the Hudson River and Chicago on the Great Lakes. When the Canal was completed in 1825, it turned New York City's harbor into America's number one port. The Chicago-New York mirror, with its antipodes and affinities, was echoed later on in the twentieth century—by the relationship between the San Francisco-Oakland-Bay Area and the mirror city-littoral region of the Southern Californian strippolis that stretches from Santa Barbara to San Diego-Tijuana. Today, as wealth and population moves towards the Gulf of Mexico-Floridian Peninsula region, Houston and Miami increasingly play the role of mirror cities.

The principle assumed here is that thalassic regions are powerful sources of the 'rule-less' order of grace that resists the entropy-death of societies. Of course there are examples of thalassic failures. New Orleans is a case in point. The ineffectualness of its city officials, the lack of self help, and the urban lawlessness graphically revealed during

the 2005 Hurricane Katrina was the result of long-term social entropy. In general, however, America portals generate more energy than enervation. The dynamics that lifts drive and activity above depression and violence can be described in the following terms: thalassian circumstances create a demand for seaports (and airports and rail ports). Portal cities become nodal points for the contact, transmission, exchange, transformation, and finally supersession of rules and roles, hierarchies and statuses, cultures and worldviews. These are places known especially for their diaspora, exiles, traders, pilgrims, explorers, migrants, 'circulating' administrators, 'journeymen', and traveling artists. Portals encourage communication across cultures and customs. The liquid space of the ecumene is a medium for replacing norms and rules, social hierarchies and chains of command. If this was the case historically in classical antiquity, then the modern age of civic capitalism, if anything, intensified this condition. As sea regions came to be incorporated into the global system of oceanic power—and, correspondingly, as the United States developed on the unprecedented foundation of multiple sea (and sea-like) regions—this had the effect of compounding the concentration of habits, cultures, stories and worldviews in the liquid spaces of portal cities (Murphy, 2003).

Park, Mumford, Arendt, Voegelin, and Strauss all treated the city as a suggestive model for American power and civilization. Their conceptualizations of this drew on a systemic analogy with the classic maritime polis. This was a good analogy. Ancient Athens was a point of interaction for Greeks from Southern Italy, Attica, and Asia Minor. Later, Alexandria brought Jews and Greeks together, Rome synthesized Latin and Greek cultures, and Antioch melded Jews and Gentiles into Christians. This was enabled by open systems of port cities and liquid regions. What made this possible was not simply the pasting of bits and pieces of culture and habits together. That is not civilization. Civilization assumes coherent meaning; coherent meaning assumes systemic pattern; systemic pattern assumes an ordering principle. That is really what open systems or portals do: they are the medium through which order is generated. Order is generated when societies and cultures meet—when Greek city meets Greek city, Dorian meets Ionian, Greek meets Roman, Hellenized Jew meets Orthodox Jew, Jew meets Gentile, Venetian meets Byzantine, Ottoman Greek meets Ottoman Turk—under certain conditions. If we live in a place where there is traffic between different normative

cultures and where there is an ecumenical 'reason of grace' that becomes a container all of them, then a common order is possible. The city—from Athens to Venice to Chicago—is a way of thinking about how such a thing is possible. The great portal city is both the symbol and the embodiment of an ecumenical order.

How does an ecumene create order? It does so by triggering negative entropy. To do this requires self-organizing capacity. Another term for this is pneumatic spirit. This simply means that ecumenical order is created not by instituting new hierarchies or new rules, new norms or new statuses, but by other kinds of media. Without question, virtue ethics and divine commandments, religious laws and secular legislation, liberal rights and libertarian permissions are media from which societies emerge. But they are not the only kinds of media. There are also non-linguistic visual, tactile, and kinetic media, mathematical-geometric and design media. These are form-creating media. Norms and rules, hierarchies and statuses employed on their own create closed systems. Designing media—media that are architectonic—create open systems (Murphy, 2001c, 2005a).

We see this luminously represented in great portal cities at their height. They habitually exhibit a plastic genius for the organization of matter. They are brilliant builders of churches, mosques, universities, hotels, stock exchanges, stations, offices, and the rest. Such building is the outward expression of spirit (*pneuma*). Spirit is the great antagonist of entropy. Spirit sweeps entropy aside. Spirit is negative entropy. Entropic social systems lose their capacity to organize matter. Spirit is exactly this capacity. One of the basic reasons for the loss of spiritual capacity is that norms and rules, statuses and hierarchies—no matter how sophisticated—on their own create non-porous boundaries between a social system and its environment.

The consequences of this are two-fold. Matter flowing between a social system and its outside is reduced. The obverse of this is that rules and hierarchies create inward-looking and de-spirited order. The over-all effect is a dampening of human activity.[54] Depression, de-moralization, and disintegration follow. To overcome this, an order that ensures porous boundaries is necessary. This order bridges between system and environment. It does this not by rules and hierarchies but by equilibrium, balance, symmetry, and other architectonic forms. It organizes system and environment relations through patterns that are self-organizing. Such patterns can be extended in unpredictable

or spontaneous ways, and in ways that don't necessarily require explicit authorization. This kind of order is pneumatic.[55] Another word for it is sacred order—self-organizing order that invests human life, and societies in history, with meaning and coherence.

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Notes

[1]   A July 2004 search on the English language title keyword phrase 'Western Civilization' in Harvard University's Hollis library catalogue shows something of the history of the phrase. The first appearance of 'Western Civilization' as a book title was in 1868 (*The influences of western civilization in China*). This was followed by a small handful of titles on Western influence in East Asia, and then in 1898 the pace picks up (beginning with Cunningham's *An essay on western civilization in its economic aspects*), and there-after on average there is a title per year till 1947. This is then followed by an explosion of titles—e.g. 6 in 1948, 9 in 1951, 6 in 1960, 8 in 1964, and onwards at this rate till 2004.

[2]   The empire of Charlemagne (742-814) incorporated what today are Switzerland, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, plus half of Italy and Germany, and parts of Austria and Spain.

[3]   . It was also the basis for a program of civic education aimed at migrants from the margins of Europe, from its Eastern and Southern rims, pouring into New York and other great American cities (Carnochan, 1993). The migrants had allegiances that were either uncertain or simply threatening to America's Anglo-Protestant majority. Western Civilization was an inclusive enough concept to fudge the distinctions between Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and even (at a stretch) Orthodox heritages. It also instinctively bridged between what had been the historic predominance of migration to America from the Northwest European littoral (Anglo, Scottish, Irish, Dutch, Nordic) periphery and the swell of migration from Continental Europe as well as from Europe's Southern littoral.

[4]   From 1943 until he retired in 1974 Hutchins was chairman of the Board of Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. He served as editor in chief of the 54-volume Great Books of the Western World, published from 1952.

[5]   For a critical though wry account of the salvos by the American higher educated against 'Western Civ', see Allan Bloom (1987). Of course, the irony was that Bloom himself was by no means an enthusiast for much of what Europe in the modern age had produced—i.e. nihilism. Bloom saw himself as a defender of American common sense against the philosophies of Heidegger and Nietzsche and Rousseau in particular. This did not stop him from loving the gourmand life of Paris. For a portrait of the sybaritic Bloom in Paris, see Bellow (2000).

[6]   A useful point of comparison is the 300,000 Union soldiers who died in the American Civil War.

[7]   In 1821, John Quincy Adams put it in these terms: 'America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the inextinguishable rights of human nature, and the only lawful foundations of government… But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy…' See Weeks (1996: 62).

[8]   Charles Beard in the 1920s developed the mature form of the national liberal view, which painted America overseas as an inveterate imperialist. William Appleman Williams (1959, 1969) recapitulated this view in a vaguely Marxist version. More recently it was re-done in an institutionalist guise by Chalmers Johnson (2004). On Beard's work, see Noble (1985), Benson (1980 [1960]). On American exceptionalism, see Lipset (1996), Glaser and Wellenreuther (2002), Hietala (2003), Madsen (1998), Gutfeld (2002).

[9] Winston Churchill (2004 [1946]). Britain's membership of the EEC, EC, and EU made no difference to the template that Churchill envisaged—of a Britain that had close economic and military relations with Europe but a strategic relationship based on common values with the United States. On his subtle mix, see Jenkins (2002).

[10] This was already observed by Emerson. See his 'English Traits' (1856) in Bode & Cowley (1981: 423).

[11] This echoes British ties to Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia.

[12] Between 1976 and 1985, a quarter of all U.S. economic and military aid went to Israel. This was equivalent to 13 percent of the Israeli gross national income. See Ferguson (2004: 113).

[13] There is no reason that other examples of such order can't and won't appear in history. But such breakthroughs are rare.

[14] On the appearance of the culture of death in the late Renaissance and early Barqoue, see Carroll (2004/1993). On the Baroque as an entropic crisis-obsessed culture, see Peter Murphy (2001: 193-220); on the lethal trajectory of Central European Romanticism, see Murphy and Roberts (2004).

[15] The same cannot be said for Japan in the 1930s, or Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the 2000s, where the mix of local religion and imported European nihilism created deadly political movements. In both cases, the only resistance to this was Anglo-American and from the settler societies.

[16] A classic example of the later was Spain's conquest of the Americas.

[17] See especially Kirk (1974).

[18] Parsons (1949).

[19] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts* (1998: 42-65). *Basic Concepts* is a lecture series Heidegger gave in the winter semester of 1941.

[20] In lectures between 1936 and 1940, and again in 1943.

[21] Eric Voegelin made the point that what counted about the metaphysics of Plato was not 'Platonic philosophy' or 'doctrine', but Plato's resistance to the disorder of the surrounding society and his effort to restore the order of Hellenic civilization through the love of wisdom. See Voegelin (1957: 5).

[22] See, for example, Leo Strauss (1993: 129; 1989: 88).

[23] One of the rare European intellectuals to have taken up this viewpoint is Agnes Heller, who in multiple works insisted that 'life' and 'freedom' were the necessary axioms of any modernity that was not self-destructive.

[24] See, e.g., Mumford (1961).

[25] One of the better known, not to say notorious, products of this Neo-Thomism was the work of the Toronto savant Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan was the most mercurial intellect of the Great Lakes ecumene, and is interesting for his ability to re-work what was at heart a Catholic worldview into an explanation and diagnosis of broadcast communication. He converted to Catholicism in 1937.

[26] Emerson (1959).

[27] Croly (1909). The kudos heaped upon this work is simply unintelligible to a non-American. See, for example, Rorty's encomium in *Achieving Our Country* (1998: 46-49).

[28] Hutchins (1936). See his comments on Aristotle (pp. 56, 68, 81, 84, 97, 98, 103, 119), Aquinas (pp. 63, 96), Newman (pp. 63, 103), Plato (pp. 78, 81, 84).

[29] Or as the quip went, at the University of Chicago Jewish professors taught Catholic thought to Protestant students.

[30] He did this with the historian John U. Nef, the economist Frank Knight, and the anthropologist Robert Redfield.

[31] This concentration of mercurial talent is unlikely to be repeated. Even distinguished later Committee alumnus like Allan Bloom, Paul Ricoeur, Charles Rosen, and Leszek Kolakowski don't quite measure up to Chicago's great 'Attic' moment. Mainstays of the Committee through its great period included the classicist and translator David Grene and the sociologist Edward Shils.

[32] When migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe first arrived in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s, the dominant Catholic theology had been a sentimental gothic-romanticism that looked back to an idealized medieval world. However, an anti-romantic Thomism emerged in reaction to this at the turn of the twentieth century. Etienne Gilson—at Toronto— and Jacques Maritain were representative figures. Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, calling on the Church to study St. Thomas, triggered the movement. Fordham University (in New York City) and St. Louis University were important Neo-Thomist centers.

The Modern Schoolman (1925), *Thought* (1926), and *The New Scholasticism* (1927) were its chief journals. (Gleason: 14-29, 113-114, 140-142, 148, 167.) The great modernist architect, Mies van der Rohe, was one of the fellow travelers of this Neo-Thomism. Based in Chicago, Mies developed one of the most influential international architectural practices in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. (Murphy & Roberts, 137-144).

33   Unorthodox Neo-Thomisms were conceivable, though. A left-field case was that of Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980). A Catholic convert, McLuhan spent a teaching career at the Jesuit and Thomist-dominated St. Louis University and at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. McLuhan blended an eccentric Catholicism with the brilliant theories about media dreamed up by his older, Baptist-raised, Toronto colleague Harold Innis (1894-1952). Gilson, a colleague of McLuhan's at Toronto, could not make sense of McLuhan's tangential Catholicism. Innis' chief insight was that a wide and interesting range of media—from the plastic media of architecture to the network media of roads and railways—were as decisive in human history as texts. The medium was the message, as McLuhan later glossed. Though both were raised on the Canadian plains, Innis was an intellectual product of Chicago in the same way that McLuhan was of St. Louis. Both were in those places for relatively short times—Innis to do his PhD. in Economics at the University of Chicago, McLuhan as a junior professor in St. Louis (1937-1946). Innis received his Ph.D. degree when Robert Park and George Herbert Mead were both teaching at Chicago.

34   To compound the irony, American Protestant evangelicals rejected texts and embraced dramaturgy, rhetoric and music.

35   The twentieth-century iteration of Thomism lost its impetus in the 1960s. Romantic-liberationist currents pushed it aside. An ambitious version of Catholic Aristotelianism was to appear later in United States in the 1980s—with the publication of works by the relocated Scottish Marxist, Alasdair MacIntyre. These works self-consciously agonized the Enlightenment tradition by setting against it the rich history of Aristotelian Christian thought. This attempt to agonize Enlightenment liberalism had its limits. For one thing, it was a very bookish reading of history. It replicated the bias of the Chicago Encyclopaedists that 'the West' or 'Civilization' was a chain of texts—each one supplementing texts that had come before. The equation of text and 'meaning in history' was problematic. Painting, sculpture, architecture, urbanism, design, and performance had a curiously peripheral role in this definition of civilization.

36   Murphy (2001: 11-38).

37   Clarke (1996). See especially Clarke's comments, pp. 48-49 and Ibana's, p. 91.

38   In a remark to James Monroe in 1801, Jefferson expounded his view: 'However our present interests may restrain us within our limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand it beyond those limits, & cover the whole northern if not the southern continent, with people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws…' See Alstyne (1974: 87).

39   The geopolitical dominance of these states was based on naval power. The both lacked the tradition of large standing armies that could overwhelm state and society.

40   The term seedbed, used of the Eastern Mediterranean, is Talcott Parson's (1966).

41   Voegelin was born in the Rhine ecumene, in Colonge in 1901, and spent three years on a Rockefeller scholarship in the United States (1924-1926), after which he wrote *On the Form of the American Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). In 1938 he returned to the U.S., in flight from Nazism. He was professor at Louisiana State University (1942-1958), moving to Munich in 1958, and returning to the United States in 1969 to Stanford University.

42   Voegelin (1952). The Walgreen Lectures were probably the greatest lecture series in history. Yves R. Simon presented them in 1948, Leo Strauss in 1949, Voegelin in 1951, Robert Dahl in 1953, and Arendt in 1956. They were the basis for Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, Strauss' *Natural Right and History*, Dahl's *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, and Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

43   Innis' friendship with his Toronto classics colleague Charles Cochrane was an important influence in this respect. See Cochrane (1957).

44   Sir Alfred Zimmern's 1911 study *The Greek Commonwealth* was also an early influence. Zimmern (1879-1957) was a classicist who became the first professor of international relations at the University of Wales.

45   Like Voegelin before him, he was a Rockefeller Fellow.

46   To cite just one of many other cases: Between 1989 and 1999, the pairing of General Omar al-Bashir and the Sorbonne-educated theological hard-liner Hassan al-Turabi were responsible for the deaths of some one-and-a-half million of Sudan's animist-Christian black African population. In 1994-1996,

Osama bin Laden had his base of operations in the Sudan. Nothing changes. The British fought the earliest iterations of this war in Egypt and the Sudan in the 1880s and 1890s—protecting Coptic, African, and Greek Christians and others from Mahdi-inspired slaughter and enslavement.

[47]   Those—like Hobsbawm (1994)—who thought the twentieth century to be defined by its 'shortness' were wrong. The age of extremes began well before 1914 and has continued unabated since 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. While it may have been psychologically tempting to draw a curtain on the horrors of the twentieth century once the disgraceful Soviet regime expired, the same horrors were promptly repeated on Europe's door-step, in the Balkans, through the 1990s. The European response to Balkan genocide was to wring hands, negotiate with a recalcitrant power, or do nothing. It was the Americans who took military action and ended the plunge into barbarism.

[48]   On the political theory of the beastiarium, see Feher and Heller (1987).

[49]   Denotes the growth of a part of a body at a different rate from that of the body as a whole.

[50]   See, for example, 'Evolution: Chance or Law' in 1975: 137-148.

[51]   It should not surprise us either that the longest term of employment that the Peirce had in his difficult life was with the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

[52]   Blank (1999) puts it thus: 'The flood of European immigrants into Algiers during the colonial period was reflected by a reverse flow of Algerians into Marseilles in the decades after World war II. North African enclaves in the European city mirror European enclaves in the North African city. In some neighborhoods of Marseilles, it is difficult to tell whether one is Europe or North Africa. Before independence, the same could be said of Algiers.' On the mirror relationship between Marseilles and Algiers, see Murphy, 2005b.

[53]   The mirror of Chicago and Toronto is very apparent in the life of mind. As a counter-point to Dewey, Arendt, Strauss, Hayek, and McNeill at Chicago, we have Harold Innis, Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, and Jane Jacobs at Toronto. For the work of the Toronto intellectuals, see: Innis (1950, 1951), McLuhan (1962), Havelock (1957, 1963, 1982), Jacobs (1970, 1984). On Innis and McLuhan's life and work, see Heyer (1998), chapters 8 and 9. For Innis, Acland and Buxton (1999), Havelock (1982), Connor (2003); On McLuhan, see Terrence (1997).

[54]   Or as Innis put it in his notebooks (1947-1948): 'Closed systems result of written tradition, i.e. Spengler – Toynbee. Totalitarian states – belief in power of written word of government' (1980: 123).

[55]   For further discussion of the nature of pneumatic order, see Voegelin (1989), Carroll (2001), and Murphy (2001b).

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