

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

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HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM - A TALE OF TWO NATURES

CELESTIAL EVENTS ENCOURAGE FRIENDLY UNITY

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WASHINGTON, DC ~*Armed Freedom*

In a New Yorker Magazine interview, DoD Secretary James Mattis says his biggest concern is, "the lack of political unity in America; the lack of fundamental friendliness." From where I stand, I agree with him.

Yet we've had two events in four days that have brought many Americans together in a friendliness that ignored the usual divisions of politics, economics, and race. Americans from coast to coast rubbed shoulders with very different fellow strangers to view the solar eclipse on August 21. Then, beginning on August 24 when Hurricane Harvey claimed lives and destroyed property of 34,000 more in Texas, thousands of volunteers united in sometimes heroic efforts to help their fellow citizens – regardless of their race or politics.

In these times of benign and malevolent celestial events, the nation's motto - *E Pluribus Unum* – Out of Many, One – has been lived out as we have come together in the unity of friendship. Tears not only of sadness and relief, but also of downright awe at the kindness of strangers are turning the rainwater salty. But there's also a *caveat* to add to this good news story.



PHOTO: Members of the "Cajun Navy" rescue victims of Hurricane Harvey.

The human brain is tragically wired. Deep, *malleable* parts of our brains are wired for this togetherness and compassion that transcends our divisions. But we are also wired for fight or flight behaviors, for self-preservation, even at the expense of others.

It won't be long before we see images of looters helping themselves to luxury items in the stores. A bit later, we'll read of unscrupulous contractors looting what's left of the victims' bank accounts as they promise to make repairs and then leave town.

Awe-filled events frequently energize the better angels of our nature. But if we're not careful, the tragic undertow of our other wiring can assert itself, even in the midst of the battle to defend what is so very right and good about our nation.

A current example of this can be seen in some of the demonstrations around the monuments featuring Civil War Confederate soldiers. Members of the alt-right, and white supremacists wishing to defend the monuments, have demonstrated the takeover of their brains by this darker wiring as they have shouted their racist slogans, making and keeping violent threats.

In Charlottesville, Virginia they were opposed by numerous groups – most of them committed to non-violent resistance, including a phalanx of numerous clergy. When the neo-Nazis threatened the clergy with violence, another group, the Antifa, moved in with their own battle gear to defend the clergy. There and elsewhere in Charlottesville, violent clashes erupted between the far-right protesters and these particular anti-fascist counter-demonstrators. One of the clergy said the Antifa had "saved his life." Dartmouth historian Mark Bray writes that "Antifa activists are not the left-wing equiva-



PHOTO: Antifa protesters

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EVERYBODY'S TALKING AT ME – I DON'T HEAR A WORD THEY'RE SAYING

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lent of alt-right trolls who joke about gas chambers. Behind the masks, they are nurses, teachers, neighbors and relatives of all races and genders devoted to shutting down fascism, *by any means they can*. They were tracking the hatred that eventually killed Heather Heyer, and that has plagued communities of color in this country, long before Charlottesville."¹

If what Bray says is correct, the Antifa's goals are certainly on the right side of history. And "the vast majority of the anti-fascist organizing is non-violent."²

But their willingness to use *any means necessary* is problematic. The use of violence to defend oneself or others is sometimes, sadly, necessary. But our dark wiring can, perversely, take over and lead to the use of violent force when other options are available. Our dark wiring can lead us to even take a certain pleasure in whupping "those who deserve it," leading to a militarized self-righteousness that taints by association the larger non-violent resistance movements opposing hatred.

Further, we have witnessed too much of this same dark wiring take over the brains of some police officers, who (tragically for themselves as well as their victims) wrongly resorted to using deadly violence – overwhelmingly against persons of color. It taints the reputation of good cops who are to be found everywhere.

A final thought: Christopher Dickey, wrote about the Gainesville, Florida pastor who first threatened, and later burned a copy of the Koran. His 2010 observation is no less fitting today: "The problem with emulating your enemy's tactics is that you risk being infected with his way of thinking . . ."³

Our brain's strange wiring means that we must be careful about how we defend what we believe is right, and oppose what we believe is evil.

DON'T MAKE ME COME DOWN THERE AND GIVE YOU FIVE MORE NEW COMMANDMENTS!



PHOTO: Mel Brooks as Moses holding the original 15 commandments in his 1981 film, *A History of the World: Part I*.

In Brook's hilarious bit, Moses drops and shatters one of the tablets, leaving only the ten we have. Careful observers have noted that Mel's Hebrew on the broken tablet includes commandments prohibiting people from passing, making people laugh, buying, staying, and (of course) breaking!⁴

³ *Newsweek*, September 8, 2010

⁴ <http://www.jewishhumorcentral.com/2013/05/foand-at-last-mel-brooks-lost-five.html>

OH, ALRIGHT, IF YOU INSIST . . .

All of us -whether we are protesting, counter-demonstrating, or conversing with neighbors and strangers – will sooner or later be involved in what is becoming (but is not yet) a national *conversation* about who we are and what we value.

Since our lighter wiring is malleable, here are 5 not-so-new commandments to help keep our dark wiring from taking over. I'm fairly certain they're the *real* original lost five!

I. Respect the other guy. Everybody else's wiring makes them as prone to both greatness and depravity as you.

II. Speak so that you make it easier for your listener to take in what you are saying. This means presenting your ideas without a put-down attached. It's a good idea to say something like, "Here's what I think, how it impacts me, and why I think it's important for all of us."

III. Listen so that you make it more productive for the other to speak their own truth . . . no matter how much *you* may not think it to be true.

IV. Reflect back to the speaker what you've heard them say . . . *without* your own spin on it. Do this before you reply. This shows you're listening to and respecting them. It lowers defensiveness.

V. Slow it down because when the back and forth speeds up, that's when our dark wiring tends to come on line.

~ *Armed Freedom*

^{1, 2} *The Washington Post*, 8-31-2017, B3. Italics added. His entire article is worth a read.