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FIDO'S FIGHT

To Sammy, licking plates clean in dog heaven.

AUM MANI PADME HUM

Avalokiteshvara

WOOF, WOOF-WOOF WOOF-WOOF-WOOF!

Sammy

Do my actions have any meaning?

Please may I kill this Arab?

Albert Camus

WOOF-WOOF?

Sammy

As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead,
trying to kill me.¹

George Orwell

WOOF, WOOFITY WOOF-WOOF WOOF

Sammy

My Japanese boss had a wild dog called Hempy, a fighting, pissing, eye-clawing, shirt-tearing, computer-licking monster, and he was big as well. He was all animal, no human social protocols at all, and his master was only slightly better house-trained. My boss, his wife, Hempy and I were once invited to a harvest festival in Yoshino village, where two distinct groups were celebrating: organic farmers in wellies, and beardy Rastas in big hats. For some reason, this village houses a number of Orientals who claim the divinity of Haile Selassie, who cook fish tea and ackie, and who have invested years into forcing their straight hair into unconvincing dreadlocks. Perhaps the mystique of the unfamiliar worked on the Rastas, in the same way that it inspired a Jamaican reggae star to choose the name Ninja Man. (In a complicated reciprocation, there is now a Japanese dancehall DJ calling himself Nanja Man.)

The males of both villager phenotypes pounded rice with huge hammers to make rice balls whilst the women cooked samples of the harvest into a feast, and that night the bong-heads sneaked off to sample the hydroponic harvest. The boss Rasta skinned up solidly for three hours before he dropped his pace. Less disciplined was Hempy, who broke his leash and attacked a smaller dog by the name of Ganja. Ganja never stood a chance.

When dog fights dog, it is difficult for we monkeys to judge the issues. No doubt there was some gross pheromonal disrespect - 'you stinkin' pooch, struttin' round my patch waving yer arse in the air, pissing in my perfumes...' To us, however, they are just dogs fighting. From the dog's eye view, our disputes must be similarly meaningless. Fighting the infidel, fighting to liberate the oppressed or to right a wrong, fighting for anything other than bones and boning bitches would make no sense at all. Perhaps a really clever dog could understand fighting for a flag. Professor Fido knows how the stench of an enemy sends him into a rage, and he understands that men experience the world through their eyes rather than their noses, so he might deduce that a different flag, different coloured skin, or Arsenal colours is reason enough to attack.

Hemp is a very naughty dog, but he wouldn't have killed Ganja. He was satisfied with a whimpering retreat. In the animal kingdom, the only 'reason' to kill something is to eat it, or to eliminate competition, and even then most animals don't go as far as to kill rivals. Contrary to Professor Fido's thesis, it is not the flag which enrages, but what the flag means. The blue coats of the Blue Coats were very handsome, but in the context of the American civil war they symbolised a Union soldier, and became a reason to kill. Dogs are less complicated. I

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suspect it is the actual smell of another dog that a dog objects to, not the implication that there is a competitor around.

Dogs are slaves to their noses, driven wild by a bitch in heat, but they cause much less trouble than we monkeys. We imagine ourselves to be civilized, but we can be driven to murder, even to genocide by symbols and ideology. Three words can change the world forever:

I love you.

Ready... Aim... Fire!

Whereas dogs have their noses to the ground, we are separated from the physical world by a world of concepts and abstract ideas, and we claim this makes us rational, but what is rational about building atom bombs?

We think we are the dog's bollocks, but from a planetary perspective we are a plague far worse than locusts or rabid dogs. We think we own the place and can do what we want with it, but no dog ever claimed more land than he could perfume. There was no canine King Philip of Spain and Jerusalem. We are far more territorial than dogs, but unlike dogs we feel obliged to rationalise our behaviour.

In 1492, a small Spanish force took the blessing of the Pope and sailed off to conquer the New World. The natives they met knew nothing of this Bible that held Europe under its sway, and neither did they know the magick of steel. Columbus noted:

They do not bear arms, and do not know them for I showed them a sword - they took it by the edge and cut themselves.²

The island of Hispaniola had an estimated population of 300,000 when they arrived. Within four years a third were dead, and 50 years after landfall a cleric doubted whether 500 natives remained. This stirred him to poetry:

To use gunpowder against pagans is to offer incense to the Lord.³

As well as gunpowder and steel, Old World disease played a large part in the conquest. The plague decimating the heathen was seen as the hand of God helping the crusade,⁴ and Christian soldiers reciprocated by preaching the Good News wherever they went.

Things were more complicated for North American pioneers a century later. They were mostly Protestants,ⁱ and all this divine

ⁱ There were also Catholics amongst them, but by this time the counter-reformation had brought Catholicism up to date. The predominantly Catholic colony of Maryland, for example, had religious freedom written into its constitution.

authority humbug reeked of the Antichrist Pope, so they developed ways of rationalizing their land-grab:

these savages have no particular propriety in any part or parcel of that country, but only a general residency there, as wild beasts in the forest; for they range and wander up and down the country without any law or government, being led only by their own lusts and sensuality. There is not *meum* and *tuum* [mine and thine] amongst them. So that if the whole land should be taken from them, there is not a man that can complain of any particular wrong done unto him.⁵

The resulting genocide was far more thorough than in Latin America. Today there are large Indian populations in South America, and plenty of Aztec, Mayan, and Inca blood in Latin American veins, but the DNA of the very few North American tribes that survived is largely confined to their reservations. Why were the Protestants so much better at genocide? What was the difference between the Spanish devils and the pale-faced warriors of the Mayflower?

The main theological difference is the matter of transubstantiation. A Catholic, especially a sixteenth century Catholic, was lead to believe that some hocus-pocus occurs under the consecrated hands of the priest during Mass, and the bread and wine **became** the body and blood of Christ. Protestants, however, stated in sober tones that bread and wine were **symbolic** of body and blood. Catholics today still keep it real, with 'genuine' chippings from the cross and filings from St. Peter's chains in their churches, and enchanted items such as the plastic Mary-shaped bottle of holy water with a screw-top head my Irish friend always keeps with her. Roman Catholicism is a romantic and raw affair, with demons to exorcise, confession to make and penitence to pay, whereas Protestantism is more sophisticated and sensible. Protestant rituals and churches are less extravagant, the flock is expected to read *The Bible* and ponder its meaning rather than listen to scary stories about saints with spears in their eyes and worms wriggling in their flesh. The Puritan pioneers planned to build New Jerusalem themselves. The Spanish expected to find it, a terrestrial paradise where Judas went for his annual holiday from Hell, with mermaids and wonderful animals, with trees hung with jewels and gold everywhere.⁶

Spaniards and Portuguese took their abstract construction (the Catholic church) to their colonies with a zealous agenda, conquering, stealing, and deporting 'in the name of the Holy Trinity, as many slaves as could be sold',⁷ but somewhere along the line, their resolve softened. Perhaps they fell in love, as Mediterraneans are wont to do. Even right at the beginning, Europeans had a soft spot for the natives. Columbus' noted:

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They are the best people in the world and above all the gentlest - without knowledge of what is evil - they do not murder or steal ... they love their neighbours as themselves ... They would make fine servants. With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.⁸

From the early years of the mainland campaign, Catholics were converting as well as killing and enslaving, and they soon began to interbreed, beginning with Cortez himself, who fell in love with his interpreter. The Indian came to be seen as a 'natural child' to be educated,⁹ the natives, the new-comers, and their African slaves mixed traditions and genes, producing beautiful religious art, cracking music, and some stunning women a few hundred years down the line. They also left all sorts of funky theological syncretisms, including Voodoo, Santeria, Candomblé, and a thread leading to Daime, of which we will hear more.

The Puritan pioneers carried an even more convoluted belief system, not only symbolic but cognizant of the symbolism. They took their **super**-abstract conception to the New World and took over. They were moved not by the Holy Spirit but by the frontier spirit. There was no poking Pocahontas. They barely mixed, and they did not convert. They ensured the Indian had a steady supply of whisky, and carried out their genocide with scientific precision, exterminating the buffalo, force-marching Indians to barren land, making treaties like civilised men and breaking them like Machiavellian princes.

21 years after Catholics made landfall, the Pope declared that savages must henceforth be considered human beings, and later threatened anyone who dared enslave them with excommunication.¹⁰ In contrast, North Americans were still justifying the tense relations with their neighbours 150 years after they arrived, vilifying 'the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.'¹¹

The line above is from *The Declaration of Independence* of 1776. This landmark document commemorates when North Americans turned against the divinely sanctioned king, in favour of 'the authority, of the good people of these colonies.' Humanist politics was born, and God himself became a rationalist:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.¹²

Once the United State of Mind was made up, the decision stuck for centuries. By the time American rationalism had become charitable enough to rethink its racist foundations, the tribes were confined to a few hundred reservations and their culture was all but dead. Senator Henry Daws visited the Cherokee Nation in the 1880s:

there was not a family in that whole nation that had not a home of its own... not a pauper... it built its own schools and hospitals. Yet the defect of the system was apparent. They have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common... here is not enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbours. Here is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilisation.¹³

Here in the civilised world, our selfishness increased with our power. We have always been the only creatures clever enough to kill ourselves, both individually and in groups,¹ but recently we have become powerful enough to commit suicide globally. In the last century, mankind produced weapons beyond the imagination of the most romantic conquistador, and technologies that pollute and disrupt the natural order, but Humanism took centuries to accept other humans. In the US, the black man remained under apartheid until the 1970s, and though a black president is cause for optimism, black ghettos and Indian reservations are still the poorest places in the US.

It has been suggested that warfare is a disease of the developed nations, because pre-Columbian skeletons have fewer wounds resulting from violence than post-Columbian generations. I suspect, however, that it is a matter of degree. The Lakota, for example, were fighting with other tribes before they began fighting with the white man, though it may be misleading to equate a cattle raid with warfare. Even chimpanzees engage in organised violence against other troops,¹⁴ but it seems that the more esteemed the abstract function, the more destructive the monkey. Rationality does not free us from our desires. It makes our appetites larger and our behaviour more ruthless. By modern standards, the conquistadors and pioneers were murderous megalomaniacs, but at least they did not wipe out species or create radioactive wastelands. From the perspective of the forgotten braves buried under the American prairies, where the *meum* of a modern cowboy might be a ranch bigger than England, our animal desires and the limitations of our flesh would have been entirely preferable.

¹ Lemming suicide is a myth that makes us feel better. They fall off cliffs when their migration instinct is confused.

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Our philosophies, our technologies, our nuclear submarines and monuments might impress us, but to any right thinking dog, they are less interesting than a juicy bone. Dogs piss on our monuments without a second thought, and the Zen monk pisses in the temple hall.¹⁵ To both the Buddha mind and the canine mind, it is the same thing: piss on a rock. Only the everyday human mind, half-awake between the two, is alarmed by the symbolism.

A healthy dog runs around his world of smell, sniffing and secreting, and a happy human in the abstract. Semantics and theories grow in the garden we tend, the sweet flowers of the arts, the sharp thorns of etiquette, the soft grass of banter, and the choking vines of bureaucracy. Everything grows in this shitbag of a brain, so the wise gardener keeps his shears sharp. If we must have philosophies, and we may be neurologically obliged to, we should at least keep them pruned, so they don't overtake the garden. If we become mindful of our minds, as a dog is mindful of his bladder, we too can produce works we can be proud of, as a dog is proud of his piss. Perhaps we can also learn the wisdom of even the dumbest dog, and stop soiling our kennels.



The Reformation marked the beginning of the shift from a culture dominated by clerics to a culture of rationalism, with man at the centre. Humanism gradually loosened the priest's grip on our minds as it filtered into all areas of culture, philosophy, and science. Medicine is the science which reveals most about our beliefs, raising questions about our relationship with our bodies and the environment, and what the painful experiences in life mean to us. Whilst ostensibly administering to our aching bones, physicians, pharmacists, psychiatrists and the rest have been engaged in a struggle for control over our bodies, and over our beliefs concerning them. Let us pinch our noses, my brothers and sisters, as we sift through another foul smelling lump of history, to find out exactly what our doctors have been feeding us.



NEMU'S END

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- 3 Zinn p. 110
- 4 *America* - Alistair Cooke (Random House, 1973)
- 5 *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* - Robert A. Williams (New York, 1990), p. 211 (quoting Governor Harvey)
- 6 Cooke, p. 36
- 7 Cooke
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- 9 *Pocahontas and her world: a chronicle of America's first settlement in which is related the story of the Indians and the Englishmen, particularly Captain John Smith, Captain Samuel Argall, and Master John Rolfe* - Philip L. Barbour (London, 1971) p. 154
- 10 Cooke, p. 37
- 11 *Declaration of Independence* - Washington, G. Franklin B. et al
- 12 Washington, G. Franklin B. et al
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- 14 *Chimpanzee Gang Warfare* - Gibbons, A. in *Science* 7, May 2004, Vol. 304, No. 5672, pp. 818-819
- 15 Master Sheng Yen's Dharma Talk (October 24, 1993) - <http://www.dharmadrumretreat.org/>