Subject: Re: Our Country
Posted by Wayne Parham on Wed, 18 Jun 2025 20:29:41 GMT
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This particular subject has been an interest of mine for decades. And it's not just an academic interest - although it is that, for sure - but it's much more of an actionable part of my life.

There are a few things I'm really passionate about and most are inter-related. This is one of them.

The truth is, my interest in cars and audio is actually more of a side thing for me. That part of me is just 'cause I like cool toys.

Specifically, what I am talking about is minds. What makes a good mind? What makes us tick? What improves our human minds, making us happier and healthier? Can we create a machine mind? Are there meta-minds, like is there a "consciousness of the Earth," a sort of collective soul? Is there a soul of the Universe? A causality of the Big Bang perhaps? Or maybe that soul of the Universe is what caused the Big Bang. Is that God?

This all started for me back when I was young, interested in computers, robots and artificial intelligence. I later studied psychology, which is a natural progression of that. And then even several religions, mostly the ones in Mesopotamia or near there. The Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Hebrews, Zoroastrians, Christians and Moslems. Tons of others I didn't study in that region, but I've studied those mentioned.

What kicked it into high gear for me happened in 1989, when I entered a fellowship that actively pursues all this stuff. We meet regularly, we work on our own mental state, and we work with others using a mentor/apprentice approach.

Our primary position is that we're all somewhat selfish and arrogant and that we tend to impose our will. So we work on stopping that and only taking action on things we actually have influence upon. If we don't have influence, there's no point in mulling things around in our minds and getting worked up. Nobody is perfect, so we fail at that goal. But that's kind of the point. We continually improve ourselves, we continually remind ourselves of our goals and we don't get hung up on our mistakes. When we make mistakes, we back up and come at things again, knowing what we know to be a better way.

Seeing the world through this view, I have come to some sort of conclusions. I could change my mind later if I learn things that change my view. But for quite some time, these have been my conclusions:
Every man is inherently slightly selfish and slightly arrogant. We also tend to get fixated on ideas, many times formed with little real evidence. Those fixations are hard to change.

We are creatures of habit. We do most things on "auto-pilot," which is an efficient way to think. But once we've formed a habit, it's hard to change. And many of our habits don't serve us well.

Almost everyone is uncomfortable seeing themselves as incomplete, incorrect or otherwise fallible. We often times pretend to be things we're not. It's actually so common, I'd say it's kind of a normal state for us as people.

We act differently when we are fighting for survival than we do when we feel safe and comfortable. When safe and comfortable, our tendencies towards selfishness and arrogance are heightened.

One could call this entitlement or narcissism. My label for this leans towards the mental models of the past few decades of the dark triad: narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

We are animals with instincts and physical cravings. We need food and sleep. We crave things that are pleasant and make us feel good. We usually recoil from things that are unpleasant or that make us feel bad. Sometimes we mis-assess those things though and build habits that cause us to crave unpleasant things and recoil from things that could make us feel good. The animal in us can get warped that way.

But even though we are animals, most of us try to live in a way that is kind and compassionate of others.

That "being things we're not" thing kicks in here sometimes to make us promote an image of ourselves that is kinder than warranted or that hides bad motives underneath good ones.

Those are just human things. We all do 'em. We all feel shame when we sit in a church and hear the preacher say stuff we did last night. We pretend we'd never do such a thing. So we keep secret our little failings - and become uncomfortable if we feel exposed - which is kind of silly 'cause we all do the same kinds of stuff, from presidents to homeless folks.

Adding to all is this is our success as a culture in America. It has moved most of us further from survival mode into comfort mode. Looks to me like we started moving this direction in the industrial revolution in the 1800s - peaking in perhaps the "roaring 20s" - but then set back in the depression and horrors of WWII. Then really kicked it up after WWII, when we enjoyed such economic prosperity.

Looks to me like since 1950 or so, we've been more and more entitled, as a culture. It shows in our actions and in our mindset. Not just politicians - every one of us. But I do think the effect on politicians is stronger and deeper, because they gain both money and power in that profession. So it would stand to reason that the arrogance and the entitlement stuff would kick in even stronger than in someone that worked as, say a tradesman at a factory.

But even our least wealthy in America have some entitlement. You can see it in their actions. They are more at risk than someone in the middle class, living in a nice home. But they are much less at risk than say, someone homeless in Mumbai. Homeless in America can demonstrate, hang out pretty much wherever and pocket whatever they beg for. Makes some of 'em kind of emboldened. Mumbai homeless can't do that. They are much more vulnerable. Totally different mindset.

I think this is why politicians are growing more and more emboldened and are showing more dark

triad traits. We all agree to have seen this in many or them. But I think we're also seeing this in individuals. All the shootings from someone that's pissed about something that is maybe unfair, but what did the shooting achieve? Why did they think they should play God? Everyone in our culture has been affected, ironically, because we've actually had it pretty good for quite some time.

One could say this is a disease of perception. The dark triad mental traits are a collection of self-deceived properties. Those traits don't achieve what the person hopes to achieve. Everyone else can see them for who they are. And even if they successfully manipulate a situation in their favor, the winnings are almost always short-lived.

Another part of the disease of perception is that we forget to be happy for the good stuff. We focus on what pisses us off, what's "not fair" or what needs to be changed - in others. We can't change others. We can vote. We can discuss. But if it's pissing us off, we're forgetting that we can't change those other people. Even our politicians. Or other countries' politicians. What is more pleasant to focus on is the good stuff that we have in our lives. I have plenty, and I prefer to look at those things than say, Putin. I fail at that sometimes, but I know what to do about that. Laugh at my failings and move on. I have a voice, but that's it.

It's all a personal affair. We all can do what we can to improve ourselves - if we actually set about to do such a thing - yet we can do very little to change others.