

ON SPACE

July 13, 2019

I am often asked to define my political program, Foundationalism. In essence, this is a request to state its core principles. The ultimate, first-level principle of Foundationalism, is that it is a politics of future past. It is to be a new thing, informed by the wisdom of the old, constructed around what is past, what is passing, and what is to come. Given that, what are the second-level principles of Foundationalism? I am just as interested in the answer as are my questioners. Some of Foundationalism's principles are, if you read my writing, fairly obvious, at least in outline. But one surprises many: Space, or more precisely, the conquest of Space by mankind.

By conquering Space, I do not mean any very specific accomplishments, which must be determined by circumstances. I mean the rebirth of a mental attitude that views great deeds achieved through daring and a love of excellence, exemplified by modern achievements in Space, as it was exemplified in exploration and conquest during the creation of today's world by the Christian West, and only by the West, over the past eight hundred years. Ideally, that would include human beings permanently expanding into Space, because that is the most inspirational and the greatest work. But it could also mean any number of other achievements, from greatly expanded robotic probes done for purely scientific purposes, to asteroid mining for economic gain.

When I advocate Space to other post-liberals, or to conservatives more generally, I tend to get looked at askance. What point of that, when there are much greater problems closer to home? True enough, but my point is that Space is part of the solution to our problems. Foundationalism is a woven thing, weft and warp. Each element is both flexible and supports the others, and such is Space. We will return to this, once we are done examining, and rejecting, views of Space that are destructive, rather than constructive.

As it happens, I didn't set out today to explain Space as an element of Foundationalism. What I was writing was thoughts on science fiction. But I soon realized that science fiction (and what is much the same thing, speculative science) necessarily embodies one or the other of two irreconcilable visions of the future of Man. One is destructive:

a set of pernicious myths, Gnostic and ancient in origin if modern in trappings, that views Space as the realm of human perfection, to be achieved through the disconnecting of men from their nature. Fundamentally, this is religious propaganda, fuel for the juggernaut of the Modernist heresy that makes man into God, a mere reworking of what the Serpent offered Eve. No coincidence, this is also the end point of the Enlightenment view of man, and also no coincidence, actual conquest of Space is impossible within this belief system. I will here refer to this belief as Perfectionism. The other vision views Space as a place for humans, as humans, to achieve and excel, to execute the works of man under the eyes of God. It is this latter vision that informs Foundationalism, both as an independent good, and as the engine and fortifier of other, more explicitly political elements of the program. I will refer to this vision as Heroic Realism.

My purpose today is two-fold. First, to attack Perfectionism, through an examination of science fiction, in which we find the plainest explanation of it. Second, to explain my goals for Space as part of Foundationalism, and to justify Heroic Realism as a means to those goals.

Before we get started, however, we must address a fundamental problem for Heroic Realists—that their program necessarily requires self-generated limits on what man does and that we, under the temporary spell of the Enlightenment, parent of Perfectionism, find it hard to conceive of such limits. Thus, Arthur C. Clarke, high priest of Perfectionism, once said: “But [men] knew in their hearts that once science had declared a thing possible, there was no escape from its eventual realization.” There is some truth in that, although “eventual” is a weasel word, and much of what is often declared possible, such as artificial intelligence or brain uploading, is probably not actually possible at all. To the extent Clarke’s statement is true, though, and realizing that some possible things are inherently pernicious, there is only one possible solution, and it is not simply to, as Clarke presumed and desired (when he wasn’t desiring young Sri Lankan men) to give up and accept that technology shall rule Man. A strong culture is perfectly capable of imposing taboos and, in fact, all strong societies impose many taboos. It is decadent and dying cultures like ours that find taboos objectionable in themselves.

For an example of this from science fiction, we can look at a book that in many ways shows Heroic Realism: Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. Among the

backstory elements is that many thousands of years before the events of the book, mankind built artificial intelligences, who ultimately had to be defeated and destroyed in the “Butlerian Jihad.” The result was the greatest commandment, rigidly enforced, of the synthesis religion of the known universe, “Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind.” Simply because we find it hard to conceive of societal taboos today, does not mean that they are not possible, and often desirable. Every strong society has had many taboos. I expect under Foundationalism, there will also be numerous taboos, some of them restored from the past and others raised as required by circumstance, and they will be both enforceable and enforced. Thus, this seeming fundamental problem is a mirage, which dissolves when subjected to a strong society.

That behind us, let’s deconstruct Perfectionism. Rather than reinvent the wheel, we can examine James Herrick’s *Scientific Mythologies*, which summarizes several myths that characterize Perfectionism. Herrick’s book is far from perfect; among other flaws, it assumes all science fiction is Perfectionist (not a term he uses) and ham-handedly posits total incompatibility between science fiction and Christianity. Still, Herrick’s framework helps clarify my project.

By “myth” Herrick does not mean a falsehood; he means a religious belief in something not proven, in something that is part of a “transcendent narrative.” Man has core spiritual needs, the need to feel he has purpose and dignity, and those always have been and always will be met by something. “[M]yths are the carriers of our guiding values, the expression of our moral precepts, and the means by which imagination is shaped.” Thus, the largest impact of science fiction is not primarily entertainment, rather its creation is a “mythmaking enterprise.” Of itself, this is neutral, and such myths can sustain and further either Perfectionism or Heroic Realism, though only the former is treated by Herrick.

Myths used to grow organically from within society, from its leaders, its culture, and from its writings, its great books. Now, or for now, they usually come from entertainment—film/television, graphic novels, mass market books, and computer games. But entertainment, as Herrick notes, is not the only source of these new myths. The other critical building block is “speculative science,” as offered by people like Carl Sagan and

Ray Kurzweil (Herrick might also have added Michio Kaku or Neil de Grasse Tyson). Herrick treats entertainment and speculative science as distinct but allied and mutually reinforcing systems of myths; I think it more precise that much speculative science is actually entertainment that hides its ideological component, but either way, we can agree that both produce myths.

The first Perfectionist myth is the Myth of the Extraterrestrial, that is, of intelligent alien life—not just that they exist, but we will meet them, and they will “inaugurate a new era in human existence,” despite the total lack of evidence for any part of this belief. This is obviously a core myth of Perfectionist science fiction. Only a vanishingly small part of such science fiction deals in humans being alone in the universe. Herrick traces modern versions of this belief back to Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century, through Giordano Bruno, Johannes Kepler, and Edmund Halley, though speculation of alien life goes back to Thales of Miletus. But the myth only really came into its own, fully fleshed-out, in the twentieth century, where our own exponential technological advancements, if projected forward, implied unlimited future progress, and therefore the possibility that other life forms had also traveled up that curve, and may even now be ready to meet us and lift us up. Why they should want to lift us up is usually glossed over. If pressed, myth proponents wave their hands and suggest aliens will view it as some moral imperative. Herrick draws a line from Nikola Tesla, through Percival Lowell, to Carl Sagan, who had enormous influence, creating out of whole cloth an entertaining narrative of future interaction of extraterrestrials with humans as a purportedly scientific exercise. Sagan imagined extraterrestrials as demigods, not only more technologically advanced, but also more advanced “in politics, ethics, poetry and music,” and likely willing to bring us into a putative “galactic federation” with a galaxy full of “cultural homogenization.” Such concepts fill much of modern science fiction; Sagan himself wrote fiction, notably *Contact*, made into a movie with obviously religious themes. We thus search for extraterrestrials, Herrick says, as in the SETI program, not as a result of rational analysis of the best way to spend money, but mostly because we are caught in the grip of the myth—that aliens will help us along the path to perfection.

Next up is the Myth of Space itself—the higher physical location where we shall be freed of earthbound constraints and wonders shall be vouchsafed to us. The common theme here is removal of limits, which, no coincidence, dovetails nicely with Perfectionism. Herrick traces this myth primarily to the post-World War II era, and ascribes it to deliberate propaganda—very successful propaganda, that influenced many of America's, and Russia's, astronauts. Science fiction embodying this myth was widely offered, along with hagiography of men like Werner von Braun, and the exhortations of John Kennedy. (Herrick repeats my favorite joke about von Braun. When a hagiographic film about him was titled *I Aim at the Stars*, a reviewer suggested that the subtitle should be *But Sometimes I Hit London*.) Some of this propaganda assumed the form of explicit attacks on Christianity, such as the 1955 film *Conquest of Space*, but most of it simply implicitly replaced the supernatural with Space. More recently we have James Cameron, who, as Herrick outlines, explicitly views achieving Space as a place to find answers, a religious belief most in evidence in *Prometheus*.

Following is the Myth of the New Humanity, where we will be improved, and, ultimately, replace God, or rather, become our own gods. This, of course, is the very core of Perfectionism. Arthur C. Clarke is again prominent here, but Herrick ascribes pride of place to Olaf Stapledon, in the 1930s books *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, both famous but little read (I've tried reading the first; it's hard). Sometimes the promised uplift is the inevitable result of evolution; sometimes it is us reinventing ourselves; sometimes it is the intervention of extra-terrestrials, demi-gods from the sky. Herrick outlines the close ties between early science fiction and eugenics, found especially in H. G. Wells. Certainly, it is worth sacrificing some humans to achieve godhood for all humanity. Isn't it? Thus, early science fiction authors were often enthusiastic eugenicists and human eliminationists. And although explicit eugenics has disappeared from most modern science fiction and speculative science (but the human eliminationism has stayed and grown), this myth is more powerful than ever. Its modern prophet is the laughable Ray Kurzweil, who keeps promising us that the Singularity is just around the corner. Herrick quotes him, "Evolution moves toward greater complexity, greater elegance, greater knowledge, greater intelligence, greater beauty, greater creativity, and greater levels of subtle

attributes such as love.” Sure it does, Ray. Evolution is God. We get it. Now go back to obsessively worrying about your death, which today is one day closer.

Overarching and embracing many of the other Perfectionist myths is the Myth of the Future, where the present is said to pale in comparison with what is to come. Herrick traces this all the way back to Francis Bacon and *The New Atlantis*, which set the framework of imagining only positive effects from mankind’s march into the Future, our new *telos*, a replacement for the Christian vision of man’s *telos*. This myth, the least specific and yet the most powerful, continues unabated, especially in speculative science. A common theme among speculating scientists, such as Martin Rees (the British Astronomer Royal) is that if we repent of our sins, such as global warming, we will be rewarded with elevation to a paradise of our own making, the parameters of which are yet to be determined, but are certain to be glorious.

We return to a topic closely tied to eugenics, scientific racism, in the Myth of the Spiritual Race. Herrick details how early authors eagerly endorsed, in real life, the theory of polygenism—the idea that humans evolved separately in separate areas of the Earth. They liked this idea, because if different species could evolve on Earth, why not in Space too, making life outside Earth more plausible? But a next step is logical, too—if the Space creatures are superior, are not some Earth humans, evolving separately, also superior to others, just as the Space creatures are superior to us all? If one believes that humans only look the same, but are really of different origin, theories of scientific racism nearly write themselves. (I was aware that the “out of Africa” hypothesis, the opposite of polygenism, had only recently been proven; I had never considered the political freight involved, although it’s obvious to me now.) It is only a short step from a space-dwelling elevated race to the belief that there is also an Earth-dwelling elevated race. Say, for example, the “Aryans.” Thus, science fiction supported “scientific” theories such as those of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who had great influence upon Western thought in the early twentieth century. Of course, again no coincidence, both eugenics and scientific racism are diametrically opposed to Christianity, which holds as one of its core tenets the inherent dignity of all men, and their equality before God.

Herrick's last two myths, the Myth of Space Religion and the Myth of Alien Gnosis, are closely linked. Aliens, who are viewed as superior in technology, must (for unexplained reasons) be spiritually more advanced too. Mostly, though, this is something that humans desirous of a new spirituality push, not science fiction authors. All these are Perfectionists. Emanuel Swedenborg (founder of the Swedenborgians), Ellen White (founder of the Seventh-Day Adventists), and Maria Blavatsky (fraudulent Spiritualist), all claimed to have visions of, and communication with, spiritually superior extraterrestrials, a claim they used to bolster their own "improvements" in human spirituality. So did the Baha'i prophet Baha'ullah, and more recently, the Raëlians. The Myth of Alien Gnosis holds that there is a hidden history of the human race, our origins and our destiny. We have alien origins, and this truth can be revealed to us now. Often purveyors of this myth hold that humans are mere vessels for a higher spiritual form, or that reality as perceived is not real. Mormon theology is a type of alien gnosis (I did not know that *Battlestar Galactica's* entire theology had strong elements of the theology of the Latter Day Saints), but the trope shows up in much science fiction, as well as speculative science, such as Fred Hoyle's belief in *panspermia*, not to mention L. Ron Hubbard's silly blending of the two, and, more recently, *The Matrix*.

Such is Perfectionism. It offers a wide range of delusional lies. What it does not offer, though, is actual Space. It instead projects back to us a false future humanity whose major characteristic is being better, nearer to gods, than today's humanity, and whose location is wholly incidental to that superseding goal. What is Perfectionism, viewed from a distance? It is simply the apotheosis of Enlightenment thought, the exaltation of atomized freedom combined with religious belief in the perfectibility of man and a false egalitarianism. Unfortunately, this is the dominant philosophy of the West of our time, and its supremacy in science fiction is merely a manifestation of that dominance.

That philosophy will never achieve Space, and doesn't want to—but it distorts our thinking about Space. As I have demonstrated at length elsewhere, it is totally false that the Enlightenment, a set of political philosophies, had anything to do with the Industrial Revolution or the scientific achievement that made possible the modern world. Even if by some magic we today decided that achieving Space was an overriding

goal, we couldn't, because the philosophy of our ruling classes is destructive to all achievement, not just that of Space. For example, we are not permitted to identify and take full advantage of talent. Instead, we elevate the incompetent through demands for "diversity and inclusion," or "fairness," or "equity," or whatever the latest deceitful phrase is for the simple activity of giving unearned rewards to the undeserving on the basis of a Perfectionist myth, that of oppression. It is truly appalling, and also just sad, that excellence is no longer ever the goal of our society, or at least of those who are in charge of our society. Evidence is everywhere, but try a simple experiment. Look for two weeks at the Google "doodles," the picture put on the front page of Google, and ask yourself each time whether the topic or person chosen for massive exposure was chosen because of excellence, or to advance an ideological agenda, usually of remedying supposed oppression, almost always by publicizing some deservedly unknown person or event. You will not be surprised by the result. In such an environment, in such a society, achievement of any kind becomes more and more of an impossibility.

Oh, maybe we'll launch a few robotic probes now and then, but those too will end soon enough. A dying society will not conquer Space, even if it manages occasionally to lift its eyes up from the sewer of intersectionality. As the population of the achieving societies of the world falls, and as the number of young, dynamic people plummets, the talent pool will shrink, leaving fewer people with the intelligence and drive necessary to dare and achieve great things. Since all great deeds are accomplished by a tiny subset of society, this is fatal, even aside from the rot at the heart of Enlightenment philosophy.

Moreover, aside from lack of talent and lack of drive, the refusal of unchosen bonds and the love of luxurious consumer comforts, both inherent in Perfectionism, destroy public support for Space, achieving which requires shared commitment and sacrifice. With our current society, we already reached as far as we're going to go, decades ago. It was sixty-three years from Kitty Hawk until man landed on the moon. It has been fifty years since, and we have accomplished nothing more. All current supposed Space initiatives are worthless, stupid, or both, with the sole exception of occasional interesting robotic probes. The International Space Station is pointless, and NASA is crippled both by being a sclerotic government bureaucracy used by Congress for

corporate welfare and by the poison of ideological hiring and programming (as when Obama and his NASA head grandly announced their primary goal was Muslim outreach and making Muslims feel good about their non-existent contributions to science). Every so often, politicians of both parties offer ludicrous plans, claiming that we'll do something grand again soon, such as go to Mars, knowing full well there is no possibility of such things happening, since there is no will to make them happen.

What of private space exploration, by men such as Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk? Those efforts are interesting, but subject to many of the same debilities. Still, under Foundationalism, such efforts might form the kernel of the new thing. What of the Chinese? Unlikely—despite enormous resources and incentives, they can't even duplicate putting a man in orbit (or won't—it is not clear to me which). And they have the same debilities, especially of an aging population declining in numbers. No, to achieve Space we need a wholly new, or wholly reworked, society.

Part of the problem is that our present society operates under a form of democracy; it is probably true that only in exceptional circumstances can any government dependent on transitory public opinion take the long-range actions necessary to conquer Space, or to achieve any great goal. In a well-run society, the mass of people have little interest in, and pay little attention to, politics. That in the past decade in America the number of people rating politics as important in their lives has swelled is a sign of accelerating decay, not strength. In a well-run society, people pay attention to their trade or profession; to their family; to their community. They leave politics, and meta decisions, to the ruling classes and the elite who run society. The mass of people and the ruling classes can together work towards, say, the Solar Imperium. The goal is not set by the masses, though, but by the ruling class—a virtuous ruling class, not the one we have now.

Why should we why want to have Heroic Realism, and to achieve Space? Because it is necessary to achieve human flourishing, which is driven by a complex interplay of human characteristics and drives. It requires, for each truly successful society, some external, temporal focus of achievement. That focus binds and impels. It offers a goal for a society, generating and evolving an outward-looking optimism that cannot be artificially created or maintained, but must be a groundswell within

society. This is a rare thing; instead, stagnancy or vice are the normal conditions of the vast majority of human societies, the former more than the latter, since it can last for far longer. A society that simultaneously senses both limits and limitlessness can create something that echoes down the ages of Man. And Space is, today, the only possible such external, temporal focus.

Human flourishing consists of a broad recognition of the common good, in which each person achieves a type of happiness, *eudaimonia*. In the modern world this can be achieved by, I think, lifting our gaze to the stars, figuratively and literally. Lifting our gaze reinforces the common good, for any society that flourishes cannot be stultified, but must have and execute on the common will to achieve. We will not make ourselves new humans, and we will not meet aliens who will make us new humans, but we will manifest ourselves as we were meant to do. As David Gress wrote of the conquistadors, in one of my favorite quotes of all time, "Living under [God's] judgment, men conceived life as an adventure, and their vivid imaginations conceived great tasks—sometimes bloody, cruel, and murderous—and impelled them to surmount great challenges. Hernán Cortes conquered Mexico for God, gold, and glory, and only a mundane imagination would distinguish these impulses, for they were one and the same."

What made the West great, from say A.D. 1200 on, was this desperate drive for achievement, which resulted from a unique synthesis of history, philosophy, and Christianity. As I often say, if not for the West, the world of today would be indistinguishable from that of roughly 1500, or earlier. Still, I don't think, with the Catholic integralists, that the world of Saint Louis IX was superior and we should go back there. It may have been superior in terms of political organization, but without the impetus to achievement, primarily secular achievement, human flourishing, material and spiritual, will always be crimped, since we cannot all be monks, wholly focused on God. So while Rod Dreher thinks we will all be better off if we are focused on small communities, with the ideal being Tipi Loschi (an Italian community he cites), I think that is not enough, though certainly it's good. It's not enough (and the oppressive Enlightenment state will destroy such communities, if Dreher's Benedict Option gets traction). Therefore, that state must

be destroyed, and replaced with the state of, say, Henry the Navigator, updated for the new millennium.

Moreover, Space, like any unifying goal, also has tangential cultural benefits. Thus, for example, a new optimism driven by Space will encourage people to have more children, and to honor those who do, reversing one of the critical problems we face today, underpopulation. Heroic Realism also will encourage the talented young to direct their talents to productive endeavors, where they will receive honor and prestige, and away from destructive, parasitical activities, such as law, consulting, and finance. Furthermore, it will unify, to some degree, our heterogeneous society—there is neither Jew nor Greek in working together for grand goals. Yes, the Foundationalist state will also directly encourage these ends (it will not be a minimalist state; it will have limited ends, but unlimited means), but top-down imposition by itself never works. Simply put, Space will help to renew our world.

A possible objection is that Space requires a focus on technology, and that technology is inherently anti-human, tending to atomize society and family, destroying the unchosen bonds and intermediary institutions that bind any competent society. This is accurate up to a point, but the answer is not to pretend that we can all live in the Shire, or go back to a type of post-technological society such as that portrayed by James Howard Kunstler in *World Made by Hand*. We are not all going to sit around in some paradise of Roger Scruton's imagining, where we smell the flowers in an English churchyard. That's simply being a nostalgic reactionary, and that will never work (though English churchyards will be preserved, and their churches attended, unlike now). The answer is to make man the master of technology, not technology the master of man, and to deprecate technology focused on consumerism. We choose atomization; it is not forced on us. If technology appeals to the worse angels of our nature, societal strictures are the solution. Probably this can only be successful in a strongly religious society, which is one reason why Foundationalism will have "pluralism lite," in which Christianity will be the dominant and officially encouraged religion.

Space, achieved through Heroic Realism, doesn't promise anything that Perfectionism does. We will not be an improved race. We will not meet aliens, probably, and if we do, it will not change us. What limits us as humans now will always limit us. Our future will be different in

externals and degree, not kind. But it will be, or can be, a spectacular future in harmony with the *telos* of man, and that is, or should be, our temporal destiny. We just have to make a few changes to our social and political structures first.