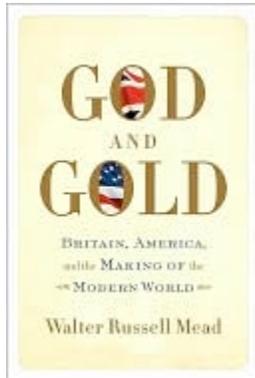




## God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us.

Today it is a pleasure to welcome back a familiar voice, heard not once, but twice before at our breakfast programs. Walter Russell Mead is a widely acclaimed expert on global affairs, as a reading of his bio will attest to.

He first spoke here upon the publication of his prize-winning book, [Special Providence](#), in December 2001, and then again in 2004, upon the release of [Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk](#).

Both of these transcripts can be found on our Web site by visiting [www.carnegiecouncil.org](http://www.carnegiecouncil.org).

Today he is here to discuss his latest work, [God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World](#), in which he examines the biggest geopolitical story of modern times: the birth, rise, and continuing growth of Anglo-American power.

What defines a great power? Conventional wisdom would tell you that it is a nation or a state that has the ability to exert its influence on a global scale. Great powers characteristically possess economic, military, diplomatic, and cultural strengths. While different sets of great or significant powers have existed throughout history, it is the rise of two English-speaking powers, Great Britain and America, one following the other, that have been so influential in world history over the last 300 years that Mr. Mead will be discussing this morning. Sustained by favorable geography and open-mindedness and tolerance for change, America, like Britain before it, built a grand strategy that kept English-speaking nations at the pinnacle of global power and prestige unmatched in times past.

Our speaker focuses on these nations' strengths and emphasizes how both Britain and America were not only comfortable with embracing capitalism, but were able to incorporate an individualistic and forward-looking religious structure that became the foundation for this Anglo-American power, thus creating the modern world. By reflecting on this past, Mr. Mead weaves together history, literature, philosophy, and religion to unearth our cultural roots in order to find meaningful patterns in the current flow of events, and he questions whether the zenith of this Anglo-American power is already behind us, or do we still have a role to play in world history.

Although there may be many books that address various aspects of the British-American ascendancy, Mr. Mead writes that the common history of these two nations in world affairs has not received the attention it deserves. With the publication of *God and Gold*, I believe it now has.

Please join me in welcoming a very special guest, a recidivist of the Carnegie Council, Walter Russell Mead.

### Remarks

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Thanks very much for that introduction. Thanks even more for an invitation. After two visits here, you know all my flaws, so I am truly touched that so many people would come here—so early in the morning, too—to hear me talk about this latest book.

The germ of this book, the core of it, came to me one day when, as one so often does, I was leafing through some old speeches of [Oliver Cromwell](#)'s—[Laughter]—and I came across a speech he made in Parliament in 1656, when he was asking for Parliament to support a war with Spain.

He looks around the house and says, "Who are our enemies, and why do they hate us?"

He answers, "It is the league of all the evil men on earth."

"Why do they hate us? They hate us because they see, and I say this in all modesty," he says, "that God's truth is more practiced here in this land than anywhere in the world, and the evil that is in them sees and hates the good that God is doing here on this island."

That was really quite astonishing, especially because I read this before September 11. At that point, the point of comparison I made was to [Ronald Reagan](#)'s "[Evil Empire](#)" speech about the Soviet Union to the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983. I found, to my astonishment, that when I put the two speeches side by side, the arguments are almost completely parallel.

Reagan, for example, says, famously, "You can't make a deal with the Communists. You can't negotiate in good faith, because Communist morality believes that the spread of Communism is its highest moral imperative, and therefore they will lie and cheat and steal to advance their philosophy."

Cromwell said, "If you make a treaty with the papists, you are bound and the papist is loose, because the treaty only binds as long as the pope saith 'Amen' to it."

What he meant was that the sin of breaking a treaty is perjury, and if the pope didn't approve the treaty, he could just forgive the Catholic prince for breaking the treaty. So there was no moral force in the Catholic religion, said Cromwell, that could inspire confidence in good dealing.

Cromwell went on to attack the human-rights record of the Catholics around the world, talking about various kinds of persecutions—conveniently, of course, overlooking certain regrettable incidents that from time to time happened to Roman Catholics in Ireland under Cromwell's rule. He said, "We're not just fighting for us and our interests, but for all of God's people."

Reagan says, "We are fighting for the cause of liberty around the world."

Cromwell says, "What are we fighting for?"

Quote: "Liberty, only that."

"Liberty," he says, "so that English merchants in Spanish ports can carry Bibles in their pockets. That's all we want."

It goes on.

Reagan quotes [Whittaker Chambers](#) to talk about, "Who was the first Communist? It was the serpent in the Garden of Eden."

Amazingly, that turns out to have also been the first Roman Catholic, that very dexterous and flexible serpent.

At first, I thought maybe this was plagiarism at work. But then I thought, [Peggy Noonan](#), a good Irish-American, is not going to be trawling the speeches of Oliver Cromwell for literary inspiration. In fact, as you go through the record of what Anglo-Americans have said about their enemies, from the time of Oliver Cromwell to the present day, you see a very consistent line of discourse.

[Joseph Addison](#), writing about [Louis XIV](#), essentially says the same thing about French despotism that Oliver Cromwell said about Spain. If you read, obviously, what [Edmund Burke](#) said about the French [Jacobins](#), what [William Pitt the Younger](#) said about [Napoleon](#) and Britain's struggle against the "evil empire" of Napoleon, if you look at what [Lloyd George](#) and [Woodrow Wilson](#) said about Imperial Germany in World War I, if you look at what [Churchill](#) and [Roosevelt](#) said about [Hitler](#) and [Tojo](#) in World War II, if you look at what American presidents from [Truman](#) to [the first George Bush](#) said about the Soviet Union, what you see is that we are fighting for liberty against a power that is trying to promote an evil despotism globally, that has a fifth column in the United States or England.

Cromwell, actually, didn't use the phrase "fifth column." That comes from the Spanish Civil War. He used the older, and, to me, more troubling metaphor, "the Catholic interest in our bowels." It would have been interesting to see Reagan try to use that one.

Obviously, we have seen it again since September 11. It's absolutely fascinating that, spontaneously, a certain line of argument emerges.

I said, well, that's what we say about them. What do they say about us?

What you will find, if you go back and look at what they say about us, so to speak, is that their vision is not the same. They don't hate us for the same reason we hate them. But they have, over 300 years, hated certain things.

They say, "You talk about liberty, but it's really just that you want to be free from all moral restraint for your pursuit of greed. Your civilization has no human or divine values in it. Everything is subjugated to making money."

"Your Protestant Reformation? That was just to get the monks off the land so the nobles could dispossess the peasants, basically."

"Your dog-eat-dog Anglo-Saxon capitalism? You whine about liberty; you crush the bread out of the poor. You write your beautiful [Declaration of Independence](#); you have slaves. Your hypocrisy is completely without compare in the world"—obviously, [Jefferson](#) and slavery.

Actually, it was [Robert Ley](#), who was the head of the German labor office in World War II under Hitler—he says, "For 300 years, absolutely nothing has changed among the Anglo-Saxons since the time of Oliver Cromwell—unbelievably hypocritical, greedier than anyone else, but talking much more loudly about how good they are."

In some ways, actually, you find that the foreign view of us is most brilliantly encapsulated in English in the poem in [Alice in Wonderland](#), "[The Walrus and the Carpenter](#)." If you think of the Walrus and the Carpenter as Britain and the United States, when the poem opens, they are in a froth of Anglo-Saxon

indignation. These ancient evils—trans fats in cooking, bribery, unkind verbal epithets for low-status ethnic groups—must be eliminated at once. Everyone else sort of thinks, "Well, we'll live with them. They are not beautiful, but we would drive ourselves crazy if we tried to get rid of them all at once."

You have the Walrus and the Carpenter weeping because the beaches are covered with sand. Then they start coming up with plans: "If seven maids with seven mops swept it for half a year, do you suppose," the Walrus said, "they could get it clear?" If enough NGOs had enough resources, could we get this job done?

Then they decide to convene the oysters together. It's amazing how the agenda they propose for these discussions still sounds like international negotiations today.

*"The time has come," the Walrus said, "to talk of many things, of shoes and ships and sealing wax—"*

Shoes would be trade in manufactured goods; ships, commerce, trade. Sealing wax was used on legal documents. So now we have moved to services, free trade in services.

*"—of cabbages (agriculture) and kings (human rights), and why the sea is boiling hot (global warming) and whether pigs have wings." (Are genetically modified organisms proper to be used?)*

Now, what is interesting here is that after this philanthropic opening and this glamorous discussion, what happens is that the oysters all get eaten, and the Walrus and the Carpenter move on down the beach.

That is basically what much of the world sees when they look at Anglo-American protestations of liberty, reform, transparency, and so on and so forth.

I don't want to talk forever this morning. I know we all have things to get to. But let me just say that it seems to me that the English-speaking world, with the wind in its sails for the last 300 years, has been convinced that this Anglo-American form of social organization, a combination of capitalism, individualism, and some other things that we could mention—some pleasant, some not so pleasant—is the equivalent of the universal force that [Hegel](#) saw transforming human society and, bringing in [Fukuyama's](#) recent book, *The End of History*. That is to say, this Anglo-American way of organizing one's activities was so efficient and productive and powerful that no one could stand against it, and so it was sweeping the world. Fukuyama saw, at the end of the Soviet Union, the end of history because that was the last major attempt to organize an alternative system, and it had been defeated.

It's interesting, for one thing, how old that vision is. You look at [Tennyson's](#) poem "[Locksley Hall](#)."

Did Paul Kennedy speak here when his book *The Parliament of Man* came out?

You missed a trick there. It's a good book.

Tennyson had this vision that, brought in by commerce, the federation of the world, the parliament of man would bring the rule of law to the world. Truman actually carried that poem around in his pocket all the years he was president and saw the United Nations as the culmination of Tennyson's hope.

Obviously, before World War I, you have [Norman Angell](#), with what still remains the bestselling book in the history of international relations, *The Great Illusion*, which talks about how war is no longer helping anybody, and basically the spread of capitalism is making great-power war impossible—a huge bestseller from 1911 to roughly 1914, when, for some inexplicable reason, sales dropped. [Laughter]

Obviously, again, with the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of history is just lurking right over the horizon. It's that pool of water we see glittering on the highway in front of us as we barrel down the road. Over and over again, we fall for it.

But there is another fact, which is that, over the last 300 years, we do win all these wars. From the time of Oliver Cromwell to the present day, the English-speaking powers, collectively, have lost only one great-power major war. I am not including things like the British being kicked out of Sudan by [the Mahdi](#) or our own unpleasantness in Vietnam, and I make no prophecies about Iraq. But in terms of the big wars that shaped the foundations of the international order from one generation to the next, from the time, basically, of Oliver Cromwell to the present day, the English have only lost one war, and that was the American Revolution.

So, in fact, we do keep winning—vulgar as this is to say. So there is some reason for this pervasive optimism.

But then I ask in my book, *God and Gold*, why is it that we are strong enough to win the wars, that our social form of organization seems to overcome its rivals, but then we so consistently misread what each victory means historically? Why are we so strong and so wrong?

This debate has been playing out in recent years as the debate between Fukuyama's end of history and [Sam Huntington's](#) vision of [a clash of civilizations](#). In fact, this is the latest incarnation of a debate in Western culture that goes back at least to the 18th century, where you have [Kant](#) and Hegel with this idea of cosmopolitan universalism and then the dissent of [Johann Gottfried Herder](#), the German nationalist writer and romantic writer, who says, "Wait a minute. Cultures are different. People don't all want the same things. Just because all you Jacobins in France want to wear Phrygian caps and cut off everyone's head doesn't mean that we Germans like to do that."

He said that a language is not just a way of communicating information. It is a philosophy. It is a way of seeing the world. What is true in Paris is not necessarily true in Weimar. What is true in Paris and Weimar isn't necessarily true in Peru or Delhi. People do not want the same things.

For Herder, the vision of progress is not this idea that we are all going to be like Sweden in the future, sort of a cosmopolitan future. For Herder, it's more like separate trees growing up in a forest. The trees don't converge as they grow. A pine tree is still a pine at the top of the tree, and an oak tree is still an oak. They may form a canopy, but each tree remains itself.

It seems to me that to try to understand what is going on in the world today, you have to see that both of these things are happening. It is not either/or; it's both/and. The power of the capitalist system, and particularly under its most competitive Anglo-American form, is irresistible. It does just beat out other things. Maybe other people can play the game better than we in the future. That is a different issue. But this form of social organization is the trump card in humanity's game of whist, as Oliver Cromwell would have said. (I don't believe he believed in playing cards, Mr. Cromwell.)

The point is, though, that while it is irresistible, other people don't necessarily like it. The more it spreads, the less they like it and the more they resist it.

I am going to close with a story that I think is full of importance for the world we live in today. It's a story from South African history. It took place in the late 1850s, when the British had been, in their usual way, spreading out from their original settlements, and they were impinging on the lands of the Xhosa people. On one pretext or another, they kept defeating them. Finally, in 1856, they take a bunch of land, and put a British garrison in the middle of Xhosa land, and it's clear that things are not the way they should be, from a Xhosa point of view, and something must be done.

The culture really felt that it was on the breaking point. This alien intrusion—overwhelming, irresistible, incomprehensible, and profoundly unacceptable—was just in their face, and what were they going to do?

One morning, a young woman, [Nongqawuse](#), was going down to water the flocks in the river. The Xhosa gods appeared to her and they said, "Nongqawuse, the problem is not that the British gods are better than your gods or that British ways are better than your ways. That's not why you are in trouble. You

are in trouble because you have compromised. You haven't had faith. You have lost touch with your ancestral ways. If you Xhosa will show your faith in the old gods, kill all your cattle and burn all your stored foods, then the gods will replace the destroyed cows with new cows, better cows, and more food than you burn. Best of all, the British will sail back to England."

She told her uncle. Her uncle told the chief of the Xhosa people, and they killed the cattle. They killed 300,000 head of cattle, burned their food, and one-third of the Xhosa people died in the ensuing famine.

This phenomenon is not an unusual thing, as this Anglo-American system spreads. There have been many cases where a people who feel that its culture and its identity is on the point of being overwhelmed have resorted to the belief that if they could just let their own authentic selves fully be, the invaders would be chased back.

The [Boxer Rebellion](#) in China had many of these characteristics.

In the 19th century, [Carlist](#) ultra-Catholic forces, fighting a liberalizing Spanish monarch backed by the British, who was introducing new ways—the Carlist soldiers, like the Boxers, believed that their uniforms could become invulnerable to the evil British bullets if they were blessed by the priests in the right way.

Think of the [ghost dancers among the Sioux](#) in the 1890s, where again the belief was, for some movements of the ghost dancers, if they danced the right dances, the ghost shirts would be invulnerable, and also if they did this, the whites would all go back across the Mississippi, and North America would be divided between an Indian half and a white half—if they could just go back to the ancestral ways, the ancestral religion, fully and wholeheartedly.

I probably don't have to draw too many conclusions for you here. Obviously, in the old days, Nongqawuse could only kill her own cattle. She couldn't go to London and start killing the cows in Britain. Technology, fueled by capitalism, has now made these movements of desperate resistance and self-assertion in the face of change and transformation much more of an issue for the rest of us, and are things that we all have to deal with. I wouldn't want to minimize the need to deal with the dangers that we face, from movements that I think, in many ways, are ghost-dancing movements.

But I think it's also important to stress that this movement is only part of what these cultures do at this moment of extremity and existential crisis. Yes, you have the Boxer Rebellion in China, but you also have [Sun Yat-sen](#). In a sense, as one door closes, others begin to open. Some people opt for desperate, reactionary reassertion of the old ways. Others say, "If we are going to remain who we are, we have to find a way to make this stuff work for us, not against us." The Japanese learned to do it in the 19th century. Even in Japan, there were Samurai terrorists who assassinated people who they thought were going to compromise with Westerners.

If you think about Xhosa history, the most famous name in Xhosa political history is not Nongqawuse; it's [Nelson Mandela](#), who was born a little more than a generation after the cattle killing.

So these moments of desperation are often a sign that a moment of dynamism and creation and change is taking place. There may be a lot of wrenching struggles in moving ahead. You can look at the history of China. The Boxer Rebellion was, alas, not the end of China's troubles, and they may not be over yet. But a process was clearly under way.

Those are some of the thoughts I have that I have tried to write about in *God and Gold*—why we are strong, why we are wrong. And, if we are wrong that our victories mean the universal victory of liberty and the end of history, what actually is going on in the world? Those were the questions I started with. I have given the best answer, at least to this point, that I can give.

Thank you.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Another fascinating and provocative discussion that I hope will raise many questions.

I would like to open the floor to questions.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Thank you for waking us up this morning with so many great poems and tales.

Many people are predicting that the 21st century will be the Asian century. You are a historian; you are drawing upon the past. But what do you predict for the future with the China that has passed the Boxer Rebellion and is coming on stronger and stronger, with capitalism, but also with communism and a different state system and many other values? What is going to happen—or with India?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** I hold with [Yogi Berra](#) on this. He once very famously said, "Prediction is dangerous, and especially when it involves the future." [Laughter]

As usual, he was right.

But I do think, from the Anglo-American point of view, the rise of Asia is challenging and exciting—I think, on the whole, a good thing.

I didn't talk about the geopolitical strategies that have been part of the Anglo-American way. Actually, in the book I talk about "The Protocols of the Elders of Greenwich: The Secret Anglo-Saxon Plan to Rule the World." Forget that Zion stuff; those guys are not ruling.

From an Anglo-American point of view, it is a terrific thing. If there are going to be nuclear superpowers in Asia, with 1 billion people, how convenient it is that there are two and not just one.

A lot of people who talk about the 21st century have this idea at the back of their minds that it's 1910, China is the Germany of Europe, America is the global Britain, and we are about to be in a struggle for our lives that will leave us gravely weakened. That is the sort of picture that people see.

I actually look at Asia and see something much more like 1815, where there are many different great powers, middle-size powers, important, significant powers, and at least the possibility exists for a stable international order in Asia that is based on a balance of power, which is guaranteed by the United States.

This does not mean that the United States engages in a contain-China policy. In my view, the rise of India means that we don't have to contain China. The realities of Asian geopolitics mean that no country—not China, not India, not Japan, not even the United States—can aspire to dominate that region.

On the other hand, what it means is that the Asian superpowers that we see—yes, they are going to have global interests. They are going to be big powers. They are going to be important players in the world. But I think maybe the Americans will continue to have a kind of unique global role because of the balance of power that looks to me to be the foundation of Asian prosperity in the 21st century.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Walter, for a fascinating talk.

I interviewed [Fernand Braudel](#) shortly before his death, and he expressed a different idea on the rise of the Anglo-Saxons. He said, "I feel much less free in Britain or America. You are rigidly constrained by your work ethic, by your struggle to get everything done. I feel freer in France or Italy, the Catholic countries. We have much more leisure, much less control."

Two questions. One is, would you agree? The other is, do you think that our self-discipline, that of the

Protestant and Anglo-American world, is breaking down in the 21st post-modern century, as we have overconsumption in all sorts of areas, whether it is calories per person or whether it is to our energy consumption and other ways that we have been unable to restrain our appetites?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** I guess what I would say is, yes, it is true that a Frenchman likes French society better than, in general, a Frenchman likes Anglo-American society. So I am not surprised that Braudel was happier at home.

This is part of what I am talking about, this Herderian logic, that different cultures have different preferences and envision work in different ways, and the relationship of personal self-fulfillment, and work in different ways.

I think, actually, the deepest split is over future and tradition, change and tradition. In most of the world, in quite different ways, but very strongly, there seems to be a deep and inevitable gulf between the past and tradition—which is seen as the home of family values, often of the sacred, of the encounter with God, who laid down the way things should be way back in the good old days—and the inevitable compromises and changes that you have to make in line with modernity.

Again, a lot of this goes back to Oliver Cromwell and that era. In Anglo-American culture, there is a tendency, actually, to see the future as the place where you meet God. If you think about it, God's call to Abraham and Abraham's faithful response to it, which is sort of the core of Protestant preaching and the pivot on which Protestant theology turns—God's call to Abraham is, "Leave your father and your father's house and go to a new land, where I will show you the promise." So the sacred is in the unknown and the new.

When Anglo-Americans are working really hard and doing things radically different, their subjective experience is, "I am approaching transcendence," whereas in many cultures around the world, when you live in this kind of instrumental way, the feeling is, "I only want to do as much of this as I can."

I actually talk in the book about a barrister in [Gilbert and Sullivan](#). He is really poor. He can't get cases—a young lawyer. He says, "I soon grew tired of third-class journeys and dinners of bread and water. So I fell in love with a rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter." [Laughter]

For a lot of the world, capitalism is the rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter. The goal is to try to get as much of the money while having as little to do with her as possible.

For this reason, I think, because capitalism is the source of so much power in the world, the Anglo-Americans, for some weird reason, actually fell in love her. I compare American culture and British culture to [Samuel Johnson](#), who fell in love with an elderly, not particularly attractive woman, and to [Benjamin Disraeli](#), who fell genuinely in love with Mary Anne Disraeli, an older woman whom people didn't consider attractive, but whom he genuinely loved.

Because we have fallen in love with the elderly, ugly daughter, we are rich as hell. Because we actually do love her, we are as happy as a Frenchman or an Italian, although we love to go over there and look.

**QUESTION:** Politicians are well aware of the dangers of public speaking and the effects of emphasis on certain aspects of their speech when they meet various groups. Lawyers are known to be able to argue either side of an issue. Recently, I heard you make some remarks that accentuated the positives in your book. Could you reverse course and focus on the positive aspects about the influence of Britain and America on the world culture?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** The positive influence of Britain and America on world culture?

**QUESTIONER:** Yes.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** So you felt this was more of a negative thing this morning?

**QUESTIONER:** Yes.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** What can I tell you? I'm an Anglo-American myself. I think that old lady is kind of good-looking, kind of cute, in her own way.

I tend to think that this society, despite the inevitable faults and shortcomings that any society has, has gone on to transform the world. Also if you look back at world history, there have been all these contests, for 300 years, against the various "empires of evil" that the Anglo-Americans have fought against. Yes, people, from Cromwell and Ireland to [the United States and] [Abu Ghraib](#), can make and have made a lot of atrocity propaganda against the Anglo-Americans, and based often on things that actually happened, although sometimes not.

When these old "evil empires," which lots of intellectuals and great thinkers and cultural figures have celebrated—[Thomas Mann](#) spoke up for [the Kaiser](#) in 1914—

But you know what? When the Spanish Empire fell, nobody regretted it, except a few Spanish nobles. When French absolutism crashed to the ground and Louis XIV failed to conquer Europe, everybody in Europe, except for Louis XIV and maybe a few mistresses, was happy about it. When Napoleon was defeated, no one tried to really restore that again, except for his great-nephew, [Napoleon III](#). Nobody wants it. When Prussian militarism collapsed after 1914, the world was glad. The fall of Hitler and Tojo was terrific. Nobody wants it back.

Again, a few people in the Kremlin would like to see the Soviet Union back, but nobody else does.

So in spite of all the cynicism, all the acknowledgment of the failings and fallibility of the Anglo-Americans in these contests, there is very little global nostalgia for the people we have defeated along the way. My guess is that when the last suicide bomber lays down the last belt of explosives and the last crazy fanatic decides to go to Harvard Business School—and may God hasten that day—no one in the world is going to be sorry. The fall of [the Taliban](#) did not inspire real outpourings of grief, even among a lot of very conservative Muslims.

So, yes, I think there is a lot wrong with what we do. I think we all should acknowledge that the oysters do have a point sometimes. But, absolutely, look back over the last 300 years. If it hadn't been us, I don't think it would have been anybody better, and I think, in many cases, it would have been somebody a lot worse.

**QUESTION:** First of all, thank you very much.

I want to put my question rather differently from the last one. I want to ask you whether you think there is an alternative for the Anglo-American narrative, other than a triumphalist narrative which depends on having enemies. Can there be a leader in the United States, without his or her leadership being defined in terms of having enemies?

You referred rather briefly to Paul Kennedy and *The Parliament of Man*. Instead of Cromwell and Ronald Reagan—you did not invoke the present leader of the United States — it seems to me that a lot of the politicians these days just focus on having enemies, and so they present themselves in terms of their ability to defeat enemies.

I am just wondering whether you think that is the only narrative that can kind of carry the Anglo-American story forward.

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** I think it depends. I think at the moment we actually do have some enemies, and I don't think you can get elected president of the United States unless people think that

you are serious about dealing with this problem. There are a lot of different ways to approach that and to frame it.

But I think it's fascinating that even after everything that has happened in terms of the failures of Bush's strategy to elicit obvious success or deep public support, certainly on the Republican side you have almost a competition to be tough, particularly among the major candidates, and on the Democratic side the candidate who is conspicuous for her toughness is stomping the opposition like nobody's business. I don't remember polls like this, in an open race, where there has been this—there has never been a national poll of Democrats that [Hillary](#) wasn't on top of. Her lead seems to be growing, even as [Obama](#) and [Edwards](#) are trying to sharpen exactly some of the differences that you are talking about.

So I have to say, at this moment in time, as a practical matter for 2008, I don't see much sign of a difference.

I think, in a sense—let's leave the British out of it for now—what the Americans need to be able to do now is, if we can, try to do something other than oscillate between triumphalism on the one hand—history is over, and we won. Therefore, as I think you saw in the [Clinton](#) years, we cut our foreign aid budgets. We cut back on all the instruments of power, while we raised our demands of the world in terms of human rights, in terms of solutions to different problems. Amazingly, sooner or later, that will drive somebody crazy enough to do something to you.

I think we also, by the way, do have to recognize that it is not simply our aggressive and annoying foreign policy, from time to time, that creates enemies. It is also the natural expansion of American economic ways. It is the way that modernity, which we generate not exclusively or entirely, but which we are seen, certainly, as the spear point of around the world, in a sense, is continually committing acts of aggression on societies around the world that don't want to change and don't welcome the necessity of doing it.

So this clash between the universal logic of liberal democratic capitalism and the particular cultural Herderian logic of the trees that just want to grow undisturbed in their own way will, I think, over time generate opposition. What we need to do, I think, is, after 300 years of this pattern, try to get a little smarter about it and try to think more intelligently about, for instance, how we make it easier for other people to find an alternative to outrageous resistance and cattle killing.

The book does have that goal at heart, I think. That's why I wrote it.

**QUESTION:** Let me put your killing-cattle hypothesis upside-down and play the devil's advocate. Have the Anglo-Americans been killing their cattle for centuries, as per young soldiers dying in wars in the name of identity and freedom?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Certainly a lot of soldiers have died.

This morning I didn't really talk about Anglo-American geopolitical strategies. I do in the book. But one thing that is notable is that, generally speaking, the Anglo-Americans have been pretty good about getting other people to do the dying.

Part of the advantage of being an offshore balancing power is—you think about World War II, where the Soviet Union was the one that had, far and away, the biggest casualties. Our casualties were about one-tenth of their military casualties or something like that. I don't have the numbers in front of me.

In the Napoleonic Wars and other wars, the British actually—if you compare, say, the 18th century, where the Austrians and the Prussians are duking it out in two major wars over Silesia that bankrupt both countries—and the loss in human lives is extraordinary—for this very attractive sausage-shaped province in the Polish hills—the British, during that same period of time, not bankrupting themselves and losing many fewer people, basically laid the foundations of a global power system that still exists today.

Actually, in terms of costliness, this geopolitical strategy has been more successful and less expensive than others.

When you talk this way, it's a little strange, because human life is incommensurable. The rabbis say that you kill one person and you kill a world. So to speak of the death of any human being—to add them up and count them seems rather heartless. But it still remains a valid historical observation that the British and the Americans have, on the whole, suffered far fewer casualties in war than their opponents, and they have won.

**QUESTION:** You really didn't talk about religion and the role religion has played in propelling America and Britain forward. Could you discuss that a little bit?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** I talked about it just a little bit at the end. It is certainly worth saying a little bit more.

One of the inquiries at the heart of this book is the question of why the Anglo-Americans love that ugly girl. What is it about her or about them that makes capitalist society and a work ethic and all these other things so attractive?

I come down to, basically, I think, the religious culture of the Anglo-American world. [Henri Bergson](#)—do people know who Henri Bergson was? He was a French evolutionary philosopher, who was the source for [Karl Popper](#)'s open society and closed society. So he is a very important figure in this way.

When Karl Popper took over the terms "open society" and "closed society" from Bergson, he left out Bergson's religious analysis of the two forms of society. Popper, like a lot of people, saw closed, traditional society as being what religion was all about. Religion, basically, is about tradition. It's about the old sacred. It's about unchanging ways. Popper, like many people of the Enlightenment, tended to see the open society as what happens when reason triumphs over religion, which leaves one with the sense that open society is always vulnerable, because we all know from either our own personal experience or historical experience that reason often loses in tugs of war inside the human breast. So if the only thing holding your society up as an open one is the allegiance of people to reason over religion, you are always threatened by theocracy, by fundamentalism, by what have you, or just simply atavism of various kinds.

As an evolutionary philosopher, for Bergson—if you think about a closed society, his analogy was a hive of bees, as the perfect closed society. Every bee, by instinct, knows where to buzz, and they all do what they are supposed to do. Bees don't deviate. There are no dissident "more honey for the workers" marching through the hive. They just go out and do. Drones' rights—they don't do that.

Then he talks about animal societies, mammal societies. Every moment of an otter's day is not programmed by its genetic coding. It has fun from time to time, at least as far as we can tell.

Obviously, human societies that are more tradition-bound are the kinds of societies where custom, tradition, taboo reign, and in an open society, people feel individually that they can do things differently.

For Bergson, in human beings, because we are conscious, instinct just can't act directly the way it does in the bee. There actually has to be sort of a conscious process going on. You start to violate a tribal taboo, and all of a sudden you feel chilly or you have bad, scary dreams of the gods telling you to stop or you might hear a voice—"watch out!"—those kinds of experiences. Bergson calls that "static religion," the kind of religion that enforces the traditions of a closed society.

But Bergson also says, if you look at human nature and human history, what you see is that we have radiated from Africa all over the world. We have gone from chasing baboons on the savannah to living in igloos and hunting seals. There obviously has to be change. We have to be able to change in order to

accommodate this. New techniques and new technologies were constantly circulating long before capitalism. So human societies need to have change, as well as stability.

In Bergson's model, he believed that religion is also caught up in this. There is an instinct for change in human beings, not just an instinct for stability. He talks about dynamic religion. He used the example of mystics, like [St. Francis of Assisi](#), who is caught up by a new vision of the world and goes on to live the kind of life that no one has ever lived before and to bring new values into the world. Then other people catch the vision. The vocabulary of how to be human grows, expands.

For Bergson, this is not the triumph of reason over religion. Rather, there is a way in which our—St. Francis is as God-inspired—it may be visions—think of the call of Abraham: "Leave your father's house." That is a very central concept in human nature, if you think about it.

"Dynamic religion" is Bergson's term for the kind of religion that sort of promotes change and invention in human society.

It seems to me that in Anglo-American society, the balance in our religious culture tipped from a fairly static form—there was a static religion punctuated by elements of dynamic religion, a fairly typical religious formation in the Middle Ages. In the English Reformation and Scottish Reformation, for a lot of different reasons, the balance gradually shifted, so that you had basically a dynamic religious culture, with elements of static religion in it. The center of gravity of the religious culture of the English-speaking world changed.

We can go into that some more. It's not necessarily a doctrinal issue. But it is, I think, very important for understanding why Anglo-American culture has been so profoundly comfortable with a social system that rests on accelerating change and the sort of progressive uprooting of all kinds of social identities and traditions.

**QUESTION:** Since you mentioned the metaphor of the beehive, would you like to introduce [Charles Darwin](#) as a metaphor into changes and post-Bergson thinking?

**WALTER RUSSELL MEAD:** Bergson actually was post-Darwin himself. When he called himself an evolutionary philosopher, he was consciously attempting to incorporate Darwinian ideas into his analysis of human nature and human history.

I am glad you mentioned Darwin, because I think this may tie a lot of things together. In the book I talk about what I call "the golden [meme](#)." It's a vision of the way the world works that, I think, helps explain why Anglo-American culture is what it is and does what it does. It is historically rooted.

Look at English common law. What happens around the 17th century is that the English start looking at their system of law. What they discover is that their legal code and their jurisprudence doesn't come out of some eternal principles that they then apply. What happens is that over hundreds of years, interpreting folk law and customary law and all of these things, and a little bit of statute law from time to time, they come up with this system. It comes up in all these petty little disputes: Whose cow is it? Who has the right to collect wood from those trees between Michaelmas and Christmas, or whatever it might be?

Out of these thousands of little petty disputes, decided by all kinds of judges over hundreds of years, emerges this very flexible framework of law and jurisprudence that is then able to handle all kinds of new issues. So the principles of property that arose in disputes over whose cow it was are now used to settle hedge fund issues. And it seems to work.

Then they looked at their political institutions and they saw something very similar. No one planned the English constitution or the English mixed-government system, but over hundreds of years, kings fought with parliaments, lords fought with commons, regions fought the center. No one planned it, but out of

the jostling and controversies emerged a very stable and flexible and—they liked it—very comfortable form of governance. The Irish had a very different view of English history. But in any case, the English were happy with it.

So this idea of an order emerging from a historical process becomes really key to the way the Anglo-Americans look at the world.

Think about [Francis Bacon](#)'s move from deductive reasoning to inductive as the method for science. Again, you don't get big principles and then try to apply them to little things. You let the facts tell you. You look at thousands of little facts and you draw conclusions from those, the way that the principles of the common law emerge from that process. The scientific method comes out of that.

The Anglican Church—no one is going to say that somehow God revealed to [Henry VIII](#) the way the church should be. Out of the divorces of Henry VIII and then all the struggles of English politics, you get the Church of England, which, for many English people, did seem like the one true church of God. So in a historical, political process emerges an order.

This is actually [Newton](#)'s vision of gravity, when you think about it, too. Newton looks at the solar system and he sees something very like English common law and the Anglican Church. He sees that, out of the unforced workings of these particles following the laws of their own nature, a stately order emerges.

You think of [Adam Smith](#)'s economics. Out of all the transactions and people following their interests in a completely unplanned way, an order emerges.

Think of our American constitutional system—[Madisonian](#) constitutionalism, the three branches, the different interests. Without any sort of directing hand, order, freedom emerges.

This is Darwin's evolution. Out of all of these animals just trying to survive, these very, very complex ecosystems and very highly developed organisms appear.

So this idea that the historical process, as if by the workings of an [invisible hand](#)—and some people in the English-speaking world say that's God and other people just say it's the Force or it's just the way things are. You can be either theistic or non-theistic and believe this and be comfortable with this.

In terms of thinking of your own life being troubled by capitalist changes—old industries dying, new ones being born, immigrants coming in, transformation of society, women moving into the workplace, changes in personal relations—if you basically believe at a deeper-than-gut level that an invisible hand is bringing order out of this chaos, you are likely to accept it and go for the ride, with less resistance than if you don't believe this.

So in a very, very deep, deep way, faith is actually the principle that animates this whole thing. You can't reproduce it, necessarily, by an act of will or teach it. It's true for some people and not true for others. But this golden meme is an immensely powerful force in the way humans live. The way different cultures in the world respond to the golden meme—the degree to which they buy it, don't buy it, are comfortable with it, uncomfortable with it—has an awful lot to do with the way the world works today.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Thank you.

If I have done my math correctly, you write a book every three years, so I expect to have you back in 2010.

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