

# Mythology in our Society

by

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Every once in a while I find it valuable to step out of my professional box and organizational mindset to look at the bigger picture in an attempt to better see the real world out there. Sometimes when I do this, I become scared, at other times I am proud and, today, I am simply confused.

Once, many people firmly believed they lived in a world where the basic rules underpinning society were clear, unambiguous, understood and accepted. Somehow, we have allowed this view of the world to become an illusory fragment of an earlier imagination. As we listen to the charismatic preach, watch governments take arms, endure activists protest and hear political opinions spew forth from TV "talking heads" and talk radio, it's fairly obvious why we have come to feel confused.

Children are being force-fed instruction instead of being creatively engaged in learning. Because change is occurring so fast, the curriculum no longer tries to keep pace. If the young find this incomprehensible, it is our fault not theirs. We have accepted so many conflicting definitions of what is right and what is wrong to accommodate various groups with an philosophical ax to grind that we as a society, as a nation, and as world, are failing to articulate and sustain our own story, principles and values. It seems as though our world is only willing to go so far in instructing it's new members. When we can't easily control an generation, which I think is the case today, our society feels challenge from a historical perspective and progressively disengages.

From my own, vantage point, this bodes ill for we for us humans if we persist in the current mindset of hopelessness and hapless behavior. This will inevitably leave us twisting in the winds of the latest ethical fashion. We seem to not really understand the need to provide a compass to orient later generations.

There is a phenomenon, known as Gresham's Law, that states "bad money drives out the good"—that is, over time, intrinsically cheaper coinage (coinage made out of less valuable material) drives coinage of greater value out of circulation. The more valuable coinage is either hoarded, melted down for bullion or exchanged overseas. (Have you seen any silver quarters recently?) I came to understand how this law applies to society thanks to a faculty member from the School of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin, Michael Benedikt. He came to my organization to discuss this subject with us after I had read an article he had written on the subject. The effects of Gresham's Law is visible in the work force, in the entertainment world, in the

sports arena and elsewhere.

Benedikt described the law in historical and practical terms at the societal level. He contends that a gradual decline of decorum and standards is occurring as Gresham's law functions. Although the professor is correct in pointing this out, the Law does not predict the consequence of the loss of decorum and standards seven generations later. The use of seven generations as a critical timeline is a concept advanced by the Onondaga tribe of the Iroquois. My concern is with our propensity to institutionalize these negative changes and codify them as the new "best" practice. We then promptly (and conveniently) forget that we ever wore a coat and tie to church because now sneakers, blue jeans and "T" shirts are acceptable. In our professional lives, we forget that we ever accepted customer's handwritten requisitions with pencil sketches now that minimum dollar orders, fancy computer systems with many required fields and that kind of 'stuff' are the order of the day.

Once we have embraced the "bad money" route we begin to actualize the practice and codify it into our current mythology. Most of us believe mythology comes to us from the ancient Greeks or Romans. I think we have created more mythology in the twentieth century using our rational-logical-scientific approach than the ancients ever did.

No one seems to remember that little voice in the back of all of our heads that always whispered in our minds ear just before we did anything that was even borderline. That was "Mother Mythology" talking. Some of us paid attention, and some of us ignored it but it was pretty difficult to deny its existence. It was a voice we all came to refer to as conscience. (Did you ever wonder why your conscious only talked in a good-evil context?) Somehow the small voice has been lost. I submit that our new mythology has helped to create a new reality by purposefully forgetting the past. We have been assisted all the way by the spin doctors of the electronic media age.

Loud conflicting voices demanding acceptance of their views plays a role as sound deadening blankets that serve to muffle that little voice our children and grandchildren once heard. I can't begin to answer all of the questions about the definition of what good values are. Maybe that is because I too am the victim of a culture in which Gresham's Law has been at work.

I think the some of the smallest bits of evidence are most insightful. I read recently that Galileo routinely recited from the Odyssey and the Iliad to his children for entertainment. Impressive! How many of you would think of doing that tonight? (Although lived his entire life with the same woman and two of the children became nuns yet, Galileo's children were all "illegitimate".)

If we are forced into defining what is right and what is wrong, but we can't understand why, it is a new "Mother Mythology" at work. She can win only by destroying the past. According to Daniel Kent, "who ever gave us the right to think we could live the way of the past when she has created so much of the future for us?"

I guess that is why we are so confused today! We are forgetting what is important and what is real. Questions and theories are infinite. But remember that little voice that comes from the bare bones of basic human values interacted with nature. It is a place we all came from and can go back to. We have allowed ourselves to become tied up in our own anxiety for the future. We have responsibilities as stewards of the air, water, soil and fellow humans.

We must have the courage to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong and teach it. Even if our view springs from our micro perspective it is by far preferable to letting the "talking heads" take us down the "bad money" where nothing is good or bad. In our captured state, we have taught nothing better to future generations and promulgated confusion. I say let's teach our seven future generations about life and human values in the context of nature.

As I ask you to do great things consider for a moment stopping the practice of letting "bad money" drive out the good.

Do Great Things!

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