By Mike Frates

February 07. 2016 2:01AM

Your View: Why are middle-class, white men hording weapons and ammunition?

Ancient Greek mythology offers priceless insights into the human condition, providing a window into our hearts and minds. The Homeric Greeks were confronted with a world for which they were not prepared. They were tested by births, deaths, lost crops and meteorological events they couldn't explain.

To cope, they superimposed the famed gods of Mount Olympus, but before Zeus explained away lightning and thunder, and his father, Cronos, personified the concept of time, what was there? What was the primordial fear at the center of it all for which the Greeks were trying to account? The answer was Chaos.

Our greatest fear in this world is not our demise. It's making it to middle age, going to school and taking on the student debt, finding a mate and growing a family with a nice house and white picket fence, then watching helplessly as a drunk driver takes it all away in the blink of an eye for no discernible reason whatsoever. It's the role chance or contingency plays in our lives. The Greek gods provided a method to Chaos' madness.

The Homeric Greeks understood the problem, but had no answer for it. The gods of Mount Olympus were capricious characters who embodied Chaos themselves. It took Plato and Aristotle of ancient Athens to provide a solution. The antidote to Chaos is the purpose-driven life. If there was a preordained plan for us, a cosmic order that took each one of us into account, then tragedy was no longer the product of chance in our lives, but a test of our faith in that plan. Everything happened for a reason.

Our destiny was written in the stars. Heavily laden with astrology, this cosmology cradled us in a purpose-driven life. Now, we were all cogs in this grand, cosmic machine, and happiness meant identifying your role in life and fulfilling it. There was a place for each of us. Soon after, the medieval priests welcomed this worldview with open arms. Place a crown of thorns on top, and this cosmology fit like a Christian glove. The purpose-driven life became a promise fulfilled by an unchallenged allegiance to a personal God. An elegant, comfortable worldview, but one that was not meant to last.

You've heard that Latin phrase of Rene Decartes, "Cogito Ergo Sum," right? "I think therefore I am," was famously published in 1641. What Descartes did was plant a seed. Instead of embracing intuition to reveal God, the Cogito wielded human reason to penetrate the world around us. Rather than appealing to the authority of biblical texts, and their priestly interpretations, humanity stepped out from beneath God's grace to apprehend the world on its

own terms. This single idea was literally responsible for the scientific, technological age in which we live.

This rational approach developed into a mathematical perspective exploited by Kepler and Galileo, and their efforts were cashed out by Newton in his masterpiece, "The Principles of Mathematics." Over the next century, philosophers applied this epistemology — or theory of knowledge — beyond Newton's physics to politics, early psychology, social theory and the law. Descartes' seed blossomed into the Enlightenment.

This was the most significant shift in understanding our species has ever experienced. We chose human reason, and the science and technology that accompanied it, over the affirmation of a purpose-driven life that followed an uncritical acceptance of God. Nietzsche declared God's death at our hands, and lamented the loss of objective moral values, but there was another problem: Chaos was loose.

Chaos is the general anxiety that belies modern life. The great French existentialists of the mid-20th century engaged Chaos. Without God and the purpose-driven life, we are free to chose our own path, and with that freedom comes a paralyzing fear. Jean Paul Sartre once called denying the nerve-wracking breadth of that choice Bad Faith, highlighting the absurdity of a life that lacks genuine purpose.

Sept. 11 poured fuel on this fire; terrorism traffics in Chaos. Our political institutions can provide some stability, but conservative politics has sown distrust in them. When middle-class, white men feel life begin to fray at the edges, they revert to their role as provider and protector, and when economic recession threatens that role, look for the rise of xenophobic hate-politics like Golden Dawn in Greece, Marine LePen's National Front in France, and Cruz and Trump in the United States.

Every generation watches its culture slip away as the next one lays claim to it, but what this post-9/11 world leaves behind is a little more frightening. Middle class, white men are hoarding weapons in an effort to project a sense of permanency on a world constantly shifting beneath their feet, but Chaos rarely presents with a bulls-eye on its back.

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