



PROTHEAN INSTITUTE COMMENT — BOOK REVIEW

APRIL 2026

Good People Need Good Codes

A review of Topher Field's Good People Break Bad Laws and Good Christians Break Bad Laws — in admiration, and in the spirit of helping a principled ally be more effective.

Topher Field stands between Australia and a kind of compliant managerialism this country is structurally vulnerable to. He stood on Bourke Street and at Flinders Street Station while the rest of the country was obeying. He produced Battleground Melbourne when the institutional press preferred to forget. He took two criminal incitement charges as the price of telling Australians what their rights were, and treats them as a badge of honour because, by every measure that matters, they are. This review is offered in admiration, and in the conviction that an ally treated as a serious interlocutor is more useful than an ally protected from the disagreement.

1. The Madisonian Test the Book Skips

Madison's greatest contribution to politics is in the principle: design for the population as it actually is, not as you wish it were. Federalist 51 is the canonical statement — *if men were angels, no government would be necessary*. Libertarians apply this rigorously to the corruptibility of state power. Politicians expand scope; bureaucrats entrench; regulators are captured. The same discipline needs to be applied to the general population too, which libertarians too often forget, presuming that all people 'should' be good.

Good People Break Bad Laws has the structural imprint of this missing test. The citizens it imagines are people morally formed in roughly the way Topher Field himself is — told from childhood that lying is wrong, that your word is sacred, that the weak deserve protection, that personal honour is real, that authority is conditional on its alignment with prior moral law – good Christian morals. The book does not generalise to populations with categorically different formation because it does not, anywhere, examine whether the slogan generalises.

The generalisation is implied rather than tested. This is not a hidden agenda but an inadvertent one: Field is arguing in good faith from inside his own moral formation, treating its outputs as universal because, within his lived experience and his audience's, they largely have been.

“Good” and “bad” are not libertarian categories. They are moral categories the framework borrows. Take Vaziri/Magennis (2010-2012; ultimately R v A2; R v Magennis; R v Vaziri [2019] HCA 35): three Dawoodi Bohra community members convicted of performing FGM on two seven-year-old girls in Sydney. The defendants were religiously observant, family-oriented, respected within their community. By their inherited substrate they were good people breaking, by their assessment, a ‘bad’ Australian law.

This is the Madisonian point in operational form. The practitioners' inherited framework determined that they were acting in the girls' best interest, preserving her intrinsic value as a potential wife for future marriage. To condemn them requires a Christian moral tradition that produced English common law, but that Christian moral tradition has been systematically erased from our contemporary culture. Without that prior commitment as the operating substrate of the territory, the slogan 'Good People Break Bad Laws' has as much defensive power for the Dawoodi Bohra community as it does Mr Field.

2. The Sequel as Theological Necessity

Good Christians Break Bad Laws is sometimes read as a confession that the first book was incomplete. That reading is wrong. Christianity is the tradition that most explicitly tells the believer that obedience to lawful authority is itself a mark of righteousness — Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1. The default position of the Christian, in scripture, is obedience. The first book's slogan therefore creates immediate tension with the Christian default for any serious Christian reader.

Reconciling them requires the developed apparatus the tradition has produced: Augustine on the unjust law, Aquinas on the conditions of legitimate disobedience, the Reformation's lesser-magistrate doctrine, Bonhoeffer on resistance under tyranny. The sequel is Field doing exactly that work. It is not a retreat from the first book; it is the necessary theological complement the first slogan made unavoidable.

This connects directly to the recently published Prothean whitepaper *Thus Spake Ilos*, which argues that the religious traditions that survived to civilisational scale did so because their behavioural codes solved a Madisonian problem: aligning self-interested actors with collective flourishing through mechanisms that operate without continuous coercive enforcement. Christianity's particular contribution — the conditional duty of obedience to lawful authority, paired with the higher-law override under tyranny — is one of those mechanisms, and one of the reasons Anglo-Christian civilisation produced both stable governance and the world's most robust tradition of principled resistance to it. Field's two books, read together, articulate this Christian architecture exactly. The first is the higher-law override; the second is the conditional duty. Both are necessary; neither is sufficient on its own.

3. The Effective Field

There is a more effective version of Field's public position waiting on the other side of the Madisonian test the books skip. It is not less courageous, less liberty-loving, or less Australian. It is more durable, because it is built on assumptions it has examined rather than assumptions it has inherited. It would say, in summary: liberty is a real and primary civilisational good, and the Australian state has, in living memory, demonstrated its willingness to violate that good wholesale; resisting that violation is the duty of every formed citizen; but the framework that grounds the resistance is the particular Anglo-Christian moral formation that produced both the Australian rule of law and the citizen-conscience tradition that pushed back against the lockdown overreach. Less elegant, but at least accurate.

That formation is a civilisational achievement. It is not the default state of human populations. It is what Australia is at risk of losing, and the maintenance of it is not optional. The first comment in this series, *The Substrate Liberty Forgot*, reads Milei's March 2026 pivot as the head-of-state instance of this recognition; the third, *The Population As It Is*, places Field, Ramaswamy, and Milei as three points along one trajectory. *Lost Coherence* whitepaper from Prothean Institute documents the structural diagnosis.

Field's next book could be the citizen's companion to all of it. Prothean Institute would read and enjoy it.

About Prothean Institute

The Prothean Institute is an independent strategic research organisation dedicated to understanding, preserving, and renewing the foundations of thriving societies.

Our mission is to develop political, cultural, and social frameworks that are deeply aligned with the structures, instincts, and emotional architectures that sustain human flourishing across generations.

All Prothean policy recommendations and strategic analyses are grounded in strict epistemic rigour and the reality of real-world conditions and human nature. Idealism, where entertained, is explicitly noted as distinct from core analysis. We reject abstractions untethered from reality and seek to equip leaders with tools that work in the world as it is — not as we might wish it to be.

This is the second comment in an ongoing series of short analytical responses to current political and cultural events, drawing on the Civilisational Architecture framework. Comment No. 1, *The Substrate Liberty Forgot*, examined the Milei pivot of March–April 2026. Comment No. 3, *The Population As It Is*, places the present review in the wider Anglosphere context. The series order of the underlying whitepaper programme is: *Lost Coherence* (published, March 2026); *Thus Spake Ilos* (forthcoming); *The Threshold*; *The Cage We Built*; *The Invisible Path*.

References. Field, T., *Good People Break Bad Laws: Civil Disobedience in the Modern Age* (Self-published, 2023). Field, T., *Good Christians Break Bad Laws: Obeying God in a Fallen World* (Self-published, 2024). *R v A2; R v Magennis; R v Vaziri* [2019] HCA 35. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Towards Estimating the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Australia* (AIHW, 2019). Madison, J., *Federalist No. 51* (1788).

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